

Digital Publics:  
New Generation,  
New Rules  
New Media,



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Editors: Dejan Verčič, Ana Tkalac Verčič, Krishnamurthy Sriramesh and John White

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Digital Publics: New Generation, New Media, New Rules  
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# 1. Introduction

## Dear Colleagues,

in the past decade, the media scene has transformed dramatically with the onset of social media. It is vital for organizations to be more than passive observers in this digital era. They need to understand the principles of communicating with digital publics, whether they are defined by age or the level of immersion in technology. As McCrindle (2006) stated: »the ever-changing technologies in business and in life are redefining our world. Yet interestingly it is the sociological and demographic changes that have more profound implications on our future than even the massive technological ones. (p. 6)«

So, what about the notion that: »young people's use of digital media and communication technologies defines this generation as being distinct from previous ones?« (Ito et al., 2006, p. 2). Is the generational divide really there? In the digital era, it appears that the key to organizational success is our ability to study and understand the human traits, attitudes and social trends, the mindset of the new digital customer, employee, activist and member of all other significant publics (McCrindle, 2006).

Today four generations live and work together: the Silent Generation (born before 1945), the Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1978) and Generation Y (born between 1979 and 2000). After Millennials (another name for the Generation Y) comes Generation Z. They were identified and defined mainly in the US and in Western Europe, yet these cohort marks are used around the world.

There is quite a significant stream of research which claims that the two most recent generations behave differently compared to previous generations, largely because of their immersion in digital technology. This new generation is believed to think differently, learn differently, and have different social characteristics and different expectations about life. Since it is claimed they prefer receiving information quickly and are relying on information technologies, does this mean the rules of communication are different for them? Do organizations need to change their communication methods, channels and strategies in order to communicate with this new generation of consumers, employees and publics in general?

The first BledCom symposium to address the issues related to the new realities of digital age was in 1996 on »Taking public relations into the electronic age«. Eighteen years ago we felt that something important was happening around us, but we weren't sure what it was and what effect it was having on communication professionals and society at large. Now we know: digitalization is fundamentally changing everything around us, it is simultaneously enabling more freedom and engineering more control than any other technology before. As the invention of the printing press established some and erased other languages, similar processes are happening again: some languages will become machine operated, while those who are slow to adjust might be seriously endangered. Digitalization of our lives is changing them (us!) and we have to stop and reflect about what is really going on.

Not so fast, please! While all of these »new realities« are important, and worth exploring, we should not lose sight of the fact that the majority of the world's 'new generations' do not have access to

the kind of digital technologies that we have described above. The Digital Divide is a reality - and not just between the North and the South, but also in developed economies. The lack of attention to the Digital Divide when new media are discussed is disappointing at best and dangerous at worst.

In this conference itself, not a single paper focused on this topic – not an atypical trend when one observes scholarship on digital media. While there is a need to address how our industry should respond to a »new generation of publics« oriented to the Digital Era, we should not lose sight of the fact that a much larger public born in the same time frame is not a part of the digital revolution. This disenfranchised public, one could reasonably argue, needs the services of our industry more than Digital Publics who already are overloaded with information and sensory perceptions. We need to also address how public relations should bridge the gap between these »generations within generations« if we are to be meaningful to society as a whole.

These are the fundamental ideas behind the 2014 BledCom on Digital Publics: New Generation, New Media, New Rules. How are these new processes affecting public relations, what does public relations look like in digital form, and what are the effects of all of that on public relations practice and scholarship? This conference is about how we are doing and how we are thinking about the new digital realities.

**Dejan Verčič, Ana Tkalac Verčič and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh**



## 2. Editors



**Dejan Verčič**

Dejan Verčič is a Slovenian public relations theorist and researcher. He is a Professor and Head of Centre for Marketing and Public Relations at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. He holds a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). In academic year 2013/2014, he was a Fulbright scholar at the San Diego State University, USA. Dejan Verčič has published 11 books. He has written more than 300 articles, book chapters, monographs, reviews, and conference papers. His recent books are *Culture and Public Relations* (2012), *The Global Public Relations Handbook: Theory, Research, and Practice* (2003, 2009), *Public Relations Metrics: Research and Evaluation* (2008). In 2000 and in 2010 he received special awards by the Public Relations Society of Slovenia, and in 2001 he was awarded the Alan Campbell-Johnson Medal for outstanding service to international public relations by the UK Chartered Institute of Public Relations (of which he is a Fellow).



**Krishnamurthy Sriramesh**

Krishnamurthy Sriramesh is a Professor at Purdue University, USA, recognized for his scholarship on global public relations. For over a decade he has advocated the need to reduce ethnocentricity in the public relations body of knowledge. To that end, he edited a book on Public Relations in Asia that remains the only book on the subject. His research interests also extend to public relations for development, corporate social responsibility and public relations, and the use of new media for public relations. His rich teaching experiences include teaching at 10 universities in four continents. During his first stint at Purdue as an Assistant Professor, he won the Charles W. Redding Excellence in Teaching Award. His teaching was also recognized at the University of Florida with the Teacher of the Year award. He has won several awards for research including the Faculty Research Award and the Golden Gator Award at the University of Florida and top-three papers at six international conferences. In 2004, he won the prestigious Pathfinder Award from the Institute for Public Relations (USA) for “original scholarly research contributing to the public relations body of knowledge.” Only one such award is given each year by this institute.



**Ana Tkalac Verčič**

Ana Tkalac Verčič is a Full Professor of Marketing communications and Public Relations at the University of Zagreb, Croatia, and visiting professor at the University of Lugano (Switzerland). She has authored, co-authored and edited numerous books including Public Relations Metrics: Research and Evaluation (with B. van Ruler and D. Verčič; Routledge 2008). Ana Tkalac Verčič is also a member of the editorial committee of the „International Journal of Strategic Communication“, and a regional editor of „Public Relations Review“. She has participated in numerous professional projects such as “Development of strategy for building the image of the Republic of Croatia”, “Improving the capacity of the civil society”. She was the head researcher on the project named “The development of the model of measurement and management of reputation of the University of Zagreb”. She is the head of the CIPR program Croatia, a lifelong learning program in public relations conducted according to the program of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations. She is a member of the Croatian Psychological Association, International Advertising Association, International Communication Association and the Croatian Association for Public Relations (where she is currently the head of the certification body). She has been the member of the International Communication Association committee for the best master’s and doctoral dissertation in the area of public relations. She is a former Fulbright scholar.



**Jon White**

Jon White is a consultant in management and organisation development, public relations, corporate communication and public affairs management. He is also a visiting fellow at Henley Business School and honorary or visiting professor at Cardiff University, School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, and the University of Central Lancashire. He has written books, book chapters and articles on aspects of public relations and corporate communication management, as well as management case studies. He holds a doctorate from the London School of Economics and Political Science in psychology, which he regards as a foundation discipline for the practice of public relations. He has been involved in Bled since the annual meetings began 20 years ago and has played a part in organising many of the meetings.



### 3. Authors



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Marja Åkerström is associate professor at Department for Strategic Communication (ISK) at Lund University Campus Helsingborg, Sweden. Her main research fields are within strategic communication, political communication, digital media and democracy, organizational communication and crisis communication. Her doctoral thesis in Media and communication science (Lund University: Cosmetic Democracy, 2010) is about democracy in local politics of Sweden and strategies used on- and offline by citizens, politicians and journalists in order to exercise influence and power..

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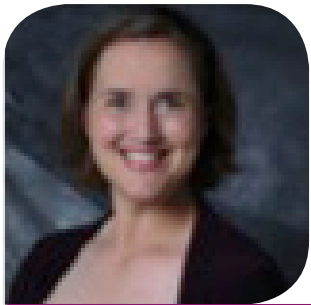
Mark E. Dillen is an international media and communications consultant and CEO of Dillen Associates LLC. During a career in the US Foreign Service, Mark managed media and cultural relations for US embassies in Rome, Berlin, Moscow, Sofia and Belgrade. He was also Minister Counselor for Political Affairs at the US Embassy in Rome. From 2000-2001, he was an advisor to the State Department's office handling assistance programs in the former Soviet Union, and in 2010-11, Mark led the communications and media relations work of the USAID Mission in Kabul, Afghanistan. During this period, he interacted on a daily basis with the international media covering the conflict in that country and developed strategies for communicating with the local population. Returning to San Francisco, he continues his international consulting work advising clients in the U.S. and abroad.

Dillen has a Master's degree in Journalism from Columbia University. He has been a Diplomat-in-Residence at the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies of Johns Hopkins University and attended the program for Senior Managers in Government at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. He has lectured at Berlin's Freie Universitaet and many other universities in Eastern Europe.



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Involved in the past in the development of university programmes aimed at building knowledge of communication management in Canada (Mount Saint Vincent University) and the United Kingdom (Cranfield University School of Management), he is now a visiting professor at the University of Central Lancashire at Preston (department of communication) and Cardiff University (school of journalism, media and cultural studies). He is also a visiting professor at the German Graduate School of Management and Law, Heilbronn, Germany, teaching there on the School's MBA programme.

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## 4. Papers



### What Do Digital Naturals Demand from Democracy?

PhD Marja Åkerström and NEMO Project leader Philip Young



#### Introduction

This paper is based on a research project which explores new qualities of democracy in the discourse of digital media. The purpose is to identify innovative aspects of democracy by investigating and analyzing how young people, defined as “digital naturals”, think and act in their everyday life in relation to “democratic practice”. This study contributes to current research in Strategic Communication, PR, Media and Communication studies and Political Science by analyzing and expanding our understanding of how Digital Naturals make sense of the concept of democracy, political engagement and strategic political communication in contemporary media landscape. Digital Naturals can briefly be described as individuals who are comfortable in an online environment, equipped through experience and exposure to the both its cultural norms and the technological competencies required to operate effectively (see Digital naturals below). It implies that thoughts, interactions and actions are performed on a daily basis (Bakardjieva, 2010) where online versus offline distinction doesn't apply anymore (Dahlgren; Miegel; Olsson, 2010) and where for instance the conception of audience is more indistinct and partially replaced by the actions of the better informed prosumer<sup>1</sup> (Toffler, 1980; MacLuhan & Nevitt, 1972; Tapscott & Caston, A 1993).

For decades, ever since the Internet made its entrance in the Western world, there have been a lot of visions regarding its democratic potential. A lot of the initial visions and arguments were sprung out of the technological abilities characterizing the Net. Interactivity, multimediality, hypertextuality (capability to surf the www), figurativity (euphemistic words of Internet activities, like “surfing”) as well as the capability to store and retrieve information (archive capability), were seen as technological qualities that set the ground for modes of thinking and acting upon the self, among groups as well as on an organizational and societal level (Dahlgren, 1996). Utopians and dystopians respectively gave arguments and examples of the society yet to come. In Swedish as well as in American and European context, great expectations spread quickly among researchers in the 1990s. In addition, many government and authorities, all set great hopes on vitalizing democracy and strengthen the possibilities of dialogue by the means of Internet, especially between citizens and local authorities. In addition, a lot of governmental investigations took place between the late



1990's and beginning of the 21st century. In Sweden the Official Report of Democracy was published in 2000 (Demokratiutredningen, SOU 2000:1), which was preceded by 13 research anthologies and 32 other publications among else. In Norway a similar interest for new media and democracy resulted in the Investigation of Power and Democracy, which took place between 1997 and 2003 and encompassed about 30 books and 60 reports. A lot of other reports, government bills et cetera have been published ever since. In most of these documents Internet was (and is) foremost seen as the last resort to strengthen the decreasing civic trust towards politics as well as the declining amount of voters in Swedish elections. Alongside Internet, the ratified efforts from the Swedish perspective include implementation of several modes of participation such as citizen motions, user- boards, citizen panels as well as discussion forums and chat rooms on the Internet. This tendency has not declined, rather the opposite. During the last decade most of the Swedish 290 communities have at least formally implemented several forms for facilitating dialogue and civic possibilities with the outspoken aim to empower citizens. In addition, platforms like facebook, Instagram and Twitter have also been adapted to a certain extent by local councils and the tendency (and idea of the importance) to put a lot of weight on the possibility to communicate electronically is still vigorous and energetic (see for ex. [www.skl.se](http://www.skl.se)). Some research results and empirical studies on actual possibilities of these new forms and modes of civic engagement in Swedish context and elsewhere rather display the opposite however (Nilsson, 2008; Rosanvall, 2008). For instance, in the thesis the Cosmetic Democracy (Åkerström 2010) the empirical results show that the dialogue with citizens, is not as highly- valued as the goal of achieving efficiency in the organization. Thus the definition in practice of Democracy is the representational democracy and not the empowerment of the citizens. The processes of rational authority are conducted by the use of different communicative strategies. The first is that politicians, when they speak of it, define democracy as representation, which decreases the possibilities to communicate, as time-consuming dialogue is seen to be intervening with the efficiency of the political processes by those in power. Secondly, it is often said in interviews with politicians and at meetings at city councils, that the citizens don't have the common sense that is necessary to manage politics and thus they are not able to make good decisions, thereby legitimizing that citizens are held outside the political decision processes. Citizen's right to vote in elections every fourth years, seems to be good enough, though the motivation for implementing the new possibilities was told to be the contrary; to encourage engagement between electoral periods.

This study displayed that even the communication online tend to be conducted and controlled by the bureaucratic norms of rationality and performed by the politicians and employees. Thus, citizens' questions are often met with silence, or with quite short answers, and the citizens are often told how to communicate and to just ask questions that are "political" and not questions that concern the management and service of the municipalities. Even though the politicians cannot define the line between a political and an apolitical question themselves they use this strategy to exclude the citizens from the political discourse. Another common online strategy used by

those in power in the studied municipalities, is to pass over a question to someone else, thereby handing over the responsibility to someone else inside or outside the organization and at the same time moving citizens' issues from the visible chat rooms on the Internet to the unmediated and invisible rooms outside these sights. The most common variations are: politicians directing issues to the employees or vice versa, politicians and employees who don't answer and instead refer to the Official Secrets Act, to other authorities or to the rational norms and rules by which the political organization is conducted. This is what Weber refers to as division of labor and specialization of functioning, which plays an important role in Modernity itself as it promotes efficiency in the labor process, the administration and the organization. But on the other hand this technique of constantly passing over a question means that responsibility becomes ephemeral and finally disappears and that the communication, the arguments and the opportunities for a public debate vanish. As this strategy is common, one could describe the entire organization as an instrument to eliminate responsibility. These examples are some of the strategies which were used in the two studied Swedish municipalities (ibid, 2010). Furthermore, they all benefit the time efficiency and the goal orientated action which constitute the rational political system and they play a significant role for the terms and conditions of public information and political communication in the studied context. At the same time, they are strategies that are counter-productive for the empowerment of the citizens as they decrease the possibilities for communication and information. The possibilities for citizens to influence political practice thus tend to be limited and constrained. This brief example of the studied practice in Swedish context shows that when the practice of silence and the avoidance of communication collide with the "promises" and visions that have been communicated initially by those in power, the confidence declines and doubt and distrust grows among citizens which may lead to a situation where lack of trust can grow towards politics. The ambitions and visions of democracy thereby become counterproductive to democracy itself (ibid, 2010). Interestingly, the citizens are mostly aware of when it's worthwhile spending energy on dialogue and when it's not and they try to find new innovative ways of bypassing the authorities offered alternatives (ibid, 2010).

Nevertheless the outspoken principle aim from the Swedish governmental view was, and still is, to empower citizens by the new possibilities of communication and to make sure that those in power will listen and take impression of civic dialogue and engagement when politics are formed. According to contemporary discourse, Internet and social media is still considered to facilitate new and better possibilities for democratic engagement and participation even though the Internet landscape is quickly changing and a lot of cyberspace activities are becoming more surveyed. One could even agree with Lawrence Lessig in his saying that "code is law", which means that computer code regulate conduct juts like legal law but whereas everyone has the freedom to break legal laws, no one can break the West coast code/law (referring to Silicon Valley) unless you are technically skilled and know how to open and manage computation source code on the net. This means that most of the communication and activities on the net are structured by computation code which decide and delimits the possibilities for civic engagement online (Lessig,

1999). As most people don't know how to manage the architecture of the net and since they don't know how to open the source code, they are in fact digital illiterates.

Bearing this in mind, how should one address the possibilities of new media, technology and democracy? Are there alternative strategies that can be found among digital naturals and what possible counter-strategies might be used? Are there for instance alternative ways of handling responsibility and accountability? What is common sense for the Digital Naturals? What is political and what is not political communication on the Net? Former research within for instance political communication (for example Strömbäck, 2010), political science (for example Dahl, 1999; Nord, 2008; Petersson, 1991; 2005), and media and communication studies (for example Hadenius & Weibull, 2008) focus a lot of the interplay between the main actors of political communication on societal level, i.e. citizens, media and authorities (politicians and employees) but do not extensively address other kinds of possible relationships. Can new patterns of the opinion making process be identified by the digital naturals? What characterize the activities, collective meaning-making, negotiation and participation processes and actions performed online by Digital Naturals?

This study, which used focus group interviews (seen as miniatures of a "thinking society") tried to go beyond these directed patterns of thoughts on democracy in order to try to capture other ways of thinking.

The purpose is to identify innovative aspects of democracy by investigating and analyzing how young people, defined as "digital naturals", think and act in their everyday life in relation to "democratic practice".

The main question to be answered is:

How do Digital Naturals understand the terms and meaning of democracy, political engagement and strategic communication in the media landscape of today?

Research questions that have guided the study are:

RQ1 How do digital naturals define democracy, strategic political communication and political engagement on a national and international level respectively?

RQ2 How do digital naturals perceive their own capabilities and possibilities to engage in and affect democracy and society through new and social media?

RQ3 What does it take to strategically communicate politics through social media channels today and how can the channels and scenes of information and political communication be described and understood?

RQ4 What are the relations between the publicly communicated ambitions of a revitalized civic sphere online and the perceived possibilities and practices of social media, and how can this be understood?

## Digital Naturals

The key concept in this study is that of the Digital Natural, and therefore this section describes and discusses this conception. All those invited to take part in the focus groups on which this work was based fall into the category we describe as Digital Naturals. Digital Naturals seeks to describe individuals who are comfortable in an environment, are equipped through experience and exposure to the both its cultural norms and have the technological competencies required to operate effectively. This categorization is used in preference to, say, digital natives, which is problematic in a number of ways.

The term digital native was coined in 2001 by Marc Prensky. He sought to divide the world into digital natives and digital immigrants, claiming those born in the 1980s and later had grown up with skills that older people would have to learn, often with difficulty, and with little prospect of fluency. He was writing for educators, and concluded that teachers must radically change their approach:

"Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach." He believed the change was so great it was "a really big discontinuity", a "singularity."

Bennett, Maton and Kervin (2008) identify two main assumptions in the literature which concerns itself with the emergence of digital natives, namely that young people of the digital native generation possess sophisticated knowledge of and skills with information technologies, and as a result of their upbringing and experiences with technology, they have particular learning preferences or styles that differ significantly from earlier generations of students.

Although our study sample was age restricted, we would strenuously avoid imposing calendar derived starting point for digital competence. We are uncomfortable with framings which suggest that certain individuals are somehow born with certain native rights, and that those born outside some notional boundaries are necessarily denied those rights, and accorded the status of immigrants. Immigration can be linked to concepts such assimilation, integration, and othering. Similarly, a person can be described as a native speaker of a language, which is somehow seen to confer status, even though being born in a specific location does not automatically guarantee greater proficiency than might be acquired by someone moving to that locality later in life.

With these points in mind, it may well be that people in a certain age group have differing notions of, say, personal privacy or approaches to storing and retrieving information that have been influenced by online experience, and which may also impact on approaches to civic engagement, but the contention is that so many other factors are in play that a division based on birth date and circumstances is of little value.

From reviewing the literature it would be reasonable to conclude that the Digital Naturals in our sample would be "smartphone cyborgs", namely that their mobile device would be used throughout the day, and be their primary source of information on many topics. They would expect to be able to look up information on any subject at any time, and to extent this would replace the need for memorising or recording facts.

They would consider it natural to communicate with friends in any part of the world, and would expect to receive news as it happens (they would not be bound by the geographical and temporal restrictions of say, the postal service or daily newspaper routines). Their experience with social networks such as Facebook and Instagram, coupled with commercial services such as Amazon or Trip Advisor, has accustomed them to commenting, reviewing and ranking, and to expect response to their comments. This access to information and routine engagement is accompanied by an expectation of transparency, both in commercial or civic processes and by (crowdsourced) fact checking.

Their engagement with news services would not involve single source, chronological narration: if they find an event interesting they will gather information from a range of sources, collating a personally curated narrative, that will combine real time commentary with historical artefacts.

The Digital Naturals perspective moves beyond “digital dualism”, the attempt to divide the world into the online and the offline. Nathan Jurgenson identifies writers that critique social media from digital dualist perspective as including Turkle *Alone Together*, Carr *The Shallows*, Morozov *The Net Delusion*, Bauerlein *The Dumbest Generation*, Keen *The Cult of the Amateur*, Siegel *Against the Machine*, Lanier *You Are Not a Gadget*, who each argue that the problem with social media is that people are encouraged or required to trade the rich, physical and real nature of face-to-face contact for the digital, virtual and trivial. “This stems from systematic bias to see digital and physical as separate; often as a zero-sum trade-off where time and energy spent on one subtracts from the other.”

Very broadly our respondents reflected these assumptions. What they did not do was show any great enthusiasm for the aspirations of those who see digital as having the potential to transform participatory democracy.

Although they accepted as a given that they had access to a range and depth of information and the means to engage in the public sphere in a way that was simply not possible before the advent of digital and online technologies, and privileged responsiveness, accountability and direct participation, there was little indication that they felt smartphones increased or enhanced political participation.

The focus groups began by discussing a passage in Nick Harkaway’s 2013 book *The Blind Giant* which crystallizes attributes shared by what Howard Rheingold, in *The Virtual Community* (1993), identifies as Cyberutopianism. In the opening chapter, *Dreams and Nightmares*, Harkaway sets out to visualise a digital dream world, where everything that could possibly go well, has:

Shining healthy people move through a sunlit space filled with birds, plants and slick technology... . . . in groups, they discuss politics, ethics, science and literature. They are voracious, interested in everything.

Many administrative and commercial decisions are managed from moment to moment- and very few companies or government departments are ever unavailable, at any hour of the day or night – but even now it’s easier to have a degree of scheduling so everyone has a shared sense of time – it helps social cohesion.

So midway through each afternoon, the whole society pauses in what it is doing to vote in a series of plebiscites, each individual drawing on his/her own expertise or experience to answer today’s pressing questions: a perfect, ongoing participant democracy in which reason prevails, moderated by compassion and goodwill, and the strong measured centre holds sway.

Anyone doing something too engrossing to participate – be it surgery or scuba – need not vote, but frequent abstention is considered odd. No one has to vote on everything, but it is generally accepted practice to vote on issues in which you are disinterested as well as those that directly affect you because the network of connection and consequence is such that nothing takes place in isolation.

With access to all the information in the world, both curated and raw data, people are well able to make informed choices and, through their combined intelligence, solve problems which seemed intractable to the old style of government which relied on notionally expert leaders. No one goes hungry, no one is alone, no one is unheard.

This is the happy valley, the high plateau of technological culture.

In *Digital Cosmopolitans* (2013) Ethan Zuckerman dismisses the idea that connecting people through the internet leads inexorably to global understanding and world peace as “not worth defending” (30). He describes “cyberutopianism as an “uncomfortable label” because “it combines two ideas worthy of careful consideration into a single undefensible package.” Zuckerman believes that “Digital Cosmopolitanism, as distinguished from cyber utopianism, requires us to take responsibility for making these potential cross cultural connections.

Our sample of Digital Naturals appear to have achieved, or at least consider themselves, consciously or otherwise, to have arrived at a place where, as Chip Bruce suggests in *The Disappearance of Technology*, a high degree of fluency renders tools and mechanisms invisible.

At the same time as experiencing digital communication in a way that dilutes or even dispels a sense of place and time, and giving them access to conversations and discourse that were little concerned with distance, they could, paradoxically, be said to tend towards homophily, used by sociologist Robert Merton in the 1940s to mean love of the same. Certainly, they recognised information-gathering behaviours that seemed to resonate with Eli Pariser’s conception of the Filter Bubble, where algorithm and constricted networks can also limit exposure to new ideas. Although all the respondents were comfortable in discussions held in English, the lingua franca of the internet, it was also acknowledged that “Language biases what we encounter, and fail to encounter every day (Zuckerman, 2013: 141).

## Methodology

This study examines how digital naturals think and act in their everyday life in relation to “democratic practice” and how they make sense of the concept of democracy, political engagement and strategic political communication on the Internet and social media. Therefore this section presents how and when the material was collected and discusses the selection criteria.

### Methodological perspective

As the aim of the study was to go beyond ‘common’ ways of studying political communication and to broaden definitions of democracy, politics and political communication et cetera, abductive (and inductive to a certain extent) theory has guided the study. Empirical results from the focus group interviews have though been correlated to and analyzed in relation to theories and results from earlier research and theories. The inductive perspective has been used by asking questions like What is this an example of? This means that qualitative studies were used, in this case by lending the characteristics from case study method. Case study method, as it has been used here (according to Merriam, 2006), accentuates the descriptive (thick description), heuristic (collecting data step-by-step), inductive and particularistic (the particular study can give knowledge on a general problem) nature of a phenomenon. Case study method in this sense also means interpretation in context and it specially considers phenomenon in constant change (ibid). This applies well to the explorative aim of the study and to the rapidly changing environment and architecture of Internet. Definitions of main conceptions (such as democracy and politics) and the descriptions of the discourse of new media were thereby delegated for discussion to the digital naturals themselves.

### Collection method and selection criteria

The design of the study started with collecting data by managing five moderated and semi structured focus group interviews as they facilitate dynamic interaction between 3-5 persons (or 6-8 persons depending on the grade of structuration from the moderators part). Focus group interviews were useful as the respondents negotiated and discussed the meaning of interaction and engagement on the net. The method is advantageous as it puts less attention on individual meanings in favor of the collective meaning making process (Wibeck, 2010). Focus groups are in this case seen as miniatures of a “thinking society” (ibid) where discursive characteristics can be identified and analyzed with for example Foucauldian tools (strategies in interactions).

Selection criteria began with the identification of three groups of engaged and experienced women and men below 25 years. Each group included different members in order to get a “prismatic” input of personalities and diversified output of opinions. The first group was selected by one of our students at strategic communication whose network includes an array of opinions. The student’s descriptions of suggested respondents included people who hold contradictory positions and perspectives which probably facilitate dynamic discussion and various standpoints. The following groups were selected out of the results from the preceding group. Three of the groups were

interviewed during 2013 and the other two groups during 2014. Respondents were partially picked from the joint master program of strategic communication at Lund University which gave interesting results as we could get opinions and ideas from for example Belgic, Icelandic, French, Dutch and Swedish perspectives.

Each focus group lasted for proximately two hours where conversations were recorded and moderated in English by the authors of this paper. By using two moderators one could lead the discussions while the other moderator analyzed the answers meanwhile and made additional questions during each session. The interviews were transcribed by two master students that didn’t attend the focus groups. The results have been compiled and analyzed by the authors of this paper. Totally 20 respondents (distributed into these five focus groups) were interviewed. Every session started by reading the first parts of Nick Harkaways the Blind Giant (2012) followed by the respondents giving their understanding and opinions of some of the key themes of the digital dream described in the book which analytically and among else concern:

- Citizens right to engage in politics, to be heard and to make their own decisions
- Every actors possibility to full participation and power in political issues
- Equal and full availability of information and knowledge
- Technologies ability to build collective intelligence
- Technologies ability to provide anonymity and thereby equality.

These themes were used as analytical standpoints as they address some of the key themes that have been extensively discussed in earlier research and theories of political communication. The results from the interviews were then analyzed in relation to these categories in order to answer the research questions and fulfill the aim of the study.

### Delimitations of methodology

This study has given some interesting results, which will be (and partially have been) followed up by other studies (quantitative surveys as well as other qualitative studies) connected to new media and modern democracy within the NEMO umbrella project of department of Strategic Communication at Lund University (Gamification of democracy et cetera). The respondents used and answers given in this study are in one sense limited to quite a homogenous population as the respondents all are well informed and educated in communication especially, and may therefore not be representative for all digital naturals. On the other hand the aim has been to interview information-rich respondents who can give thoughtful and conversant opinions on the topics. The strength of the qualitative study is to closely take care of every argument given even if it has only been given by one respondent. The results presented below are therefore not categorized into predetermined categories but diversified and prismatic in order to fulfill the aim of this study which is to discover new ways of thinking about democracy in the new media landscape.



## Results and analysis

The results that have been identified will be presented on a broader base in three conceptual sections: what democracy is (how to define and talk about it), what democracy do (how to act/perform/not act) and what democracy can be (how to think about achievements).

### What democracy is - Conventional thinking on definitions and unconventional practice

The first theme discussed in the focus groups concerned the definition of democracy itself. A notable result from this part of the sessions was that DN's define democracy as something strictly limited to formal procedures, IGO's (in-governmental organizations) and that the content to be discussed and managed, i.e. politics, is something boring which is detached from ordinary life and ordinary people. Additionally, some respondents didn't see their own actions and communication on social media as political. They put little weight on their own contributions and had low self-esteem on their own capability to influence and change societal issues. Nevertheless when speaking with them about their actual performances on the net, the opposite was displayed. One of the respondents answers can serve as an example. Regina, a 21 year old female communication student, who has a humoristic blog (her blog name is Egoina) is actually top-ranked on some blog lists (see for ex. [www.bloggportalen.se](http://www.bloggportalen.se)) doesn't perceive herself as political even though she writes about equality and gender issues that can easily be defined as political matters. According to herself politics is not about everyday practice:

I: Do you feel that people listen to you because of your blog?

E: Yes, I do. But I don't write about political stuff.

I: You write about equality, people read it! Do you have any feeling that it is making a difference then?

E: Yes, but.. I don't see that as a political thing. I see it like everyday...practice...

\*I= Interviewer, DN= Digital Natural, E=Egina/Regina

So Egoina has more than 120 000 unique visits every week and still doesn't consider herself as influential and doesn't see her communication as political. Nevertheless, her way of using humor related to societal issues concerning equality matters, can certainly be seen as a strategically communicative tool for getting attention and influencing followers. In this way humor seems to be a successful tool for strategic successful communication. Considering the amount of weekly visitors, presumably a lot of visitors come back to her blog on a weekly or even daily basis. This means that her communication must be perceived as not only entertaining but also rewarding and as meaningful progress for her followers as they probably do get back to listen to a new story (and embedded argument). One could even argue that this example captures some ingredients that perceptually and theoretically seem to be absent in conventional definitions of political strategic communication.

### What democracy does – how to act upon target groups for strategic political communication

As previously described, earlier research within political communication tend to focus on the interplay and strategies between the main actors of political communication on a societal and local level (citizens, media and authorities), thereby measuring trust towards media, towards politicians and employees and trying to find cause and effects on depressing results of elections et cetera. This is not hard to understand as the formal procedures in a representational democracy are formally structured around these relationships and procedures. However, when this theme was introduced to the respondents of the focus groups they didn't solely mention these three actors. Instead they gave their own examples of how they were being influenced and of who they tried to influence themselves. The prime target group often mentioned was other citizens and not directly the politicians even though they did comment on this (see Availability- accountability below):

I: Are the people who matter hearing your voice?

DN: Yes

I: Formal politicians, are they hearing your voice?

DN: no, but I think the people that matter are the young girls, young people who are reading the things I want them to.

\*I= Interviewer, DN= Digital Natural

So the respondents are directing their communication towards peers and other citizens by trying to engage and change not how politicians think, but how other people think:

DN: The thing is, for the last couple of years Sweden democrats have risen in Sweden. I think all the immigrants see this as a problem...

immigrants aren't bad for Sweden, as Sweden democrats say. So I want to change the view of the Swedish people...

As one may recall from early history of the Internet, when prime ministers and other famous politicians around the world replied e-mail from citizens, this was seen as examples of how successful political communication could be due to the new ICT. In Sweden there is for example the contemporary foreign minister Carl Bildt who is often set as an example of new democratic potential through new media. In contrast to these conventional discourse and way of thinking, the object of change and influence for the respondents were other people and not politicians or political organizations. One conclusion is that communicative actions might be more successful when they are horizontally performed on the net and blogs et cetera as digital naturals tend to direct their communicative actions towards other citizens. One could even argue that these communicative actions on the net are updated versions of the old hypothesis of two-step flow of communication (Katz & Lazarsfeld) as it is DN's like the persons quoted above and not mass media that work as opinion leaders towards people and influence their way of thinking on democracy. So in order to



change attitudes and/or behavior, political organizations and communicators must find ways to identify the influential change agents and opinion leaders on the net (Rogers, 1995).

### Availability and accountability

The Digital Naturals do politics in their own way as described above. They retweet, blog and comment in order to engage their peers as these are their primary target group for communicative actions. But if and when they contact politicians directly, they know when the communication is genuine and when it's "fake". They know how to identify and sense if the answers given online are trustworthy or if they are automatically replied. In other words, they are media literate as they are sensitive to the way messages or communication acts are conducted and handled online. They are fully aware that politicians, especially those with high positions, often don't have the time to reply and communicate personally and that "ghost writers" may answer, but the DN's don't care as long as they perceive the answers as reliable so that they can count on the answers and arguments given to them.

DN1: I know big bloggers who have employees who run their facebook pages and stuff. Do you know Jens Stoltenberg, the Norwegian... I

follow him on facebook and he is really good. He posts like everyday.

DN2: But he has got a ghostwriter... For what I know

DN1: But it feels like him, so it doesn't really matter.

I: It feels like him, so it doesn't really matter?

DN1: Yeah, it's a little personal touch.

DN3: If they can be accountable for what they say, then it's probably... it works for me..

\*I= Interviewer, DN1, 2, 3= different Digital Naturals

Digital Naturals see availability as very important and something that must be guaranteed for everyone who communicate online, and even if it's not the addressed person who communicates with them it doesn't matter as long as it feels genuine and as long as the politician can be held accountable for the answers given. Some political as well as business organizations have already realized this whereas those who still use auto replies are not taken for serious among DN's.

### Reasoned action and what democracy can be

When it comes to the fourth and last research question of this paper concerning relations between publicly communicated ambitions of a revitalized civic sphere in relation to the perceived possibilities of social media (as briefly described in the introductory part of this paper), results show a discrepancy between ambitions and reality. Digital Naturals consider much of the online communication to be very far away from the idea of the "rational man". Rational discussion and the Habermasian theory of reasoned action (e.g. Habermas, J, 1996) is rare according to the DN's. The majority principle which states that if enough people act in a certain direction online, this will

make a difference. According to the DN's the majority principle is close to what they refer to as "clicktivism", where people have opinions and repost facts of which they have no knowledge. This is seen as problematic among DN's as majority principle outweighs rational discussion. The digital dream can easily turn into a nightmare! The DN's could give loads of online examples of this (e.g. "Kony 2012") which put the finger on the result described above.

As DN's mostly retweet and repost comments and information from their peers, they don't check the facts and don't search for alternative sources but instead they stick to the sources which were supplied from their friends. They barely don't read newspapers and don't use other traditional media channels any longer but when they do, they satisfy with the channels they are used to, or with the ones that were recommended by their friends.

I: Has social media made any difference to your engagement with politics?

DN: Yeah, I follow Barack Obama on Instagram.. Yeah, and it's also on facebook people share like articles from Aftonbladet about political stuff and that's why I read it, because my friend reposted it.

This means that the gate-keeping function which was earlier held by chief editors of old media channels now are partially replaced by the Digital Naturals themselves.

DN: I agree with you, I tend to look at the information on Facebook instead of going to the actual websites of the newspapers, which actually is problematic, I think, because then there is another person or other people that decide not frame, but choose for me..

I: Gate keeping function?

DN: Yeah, they are gatekeepers. For the information, and I let them to be the gatekeeper, so that's why I am kind of passive, and I know I should go on the news sites myself.

In the long run this means that different DN's can live in parallel worlds and that they can stick to different "truths". They do see it as problematic themselves but explain it as a discourse of contemporary life where source control is considered to be too time consuming. These results show a tendency that might increase in future where different people are differently informed and where the common ground for facts, truth and knowledge tend to be stripped down and fragmented. This extreme relativism which is nurtured by different online communities where "anything goes" might to a certain extent even explain why some contemporary conflicts tend to be stigmatized today (see coming paper Åkerström Alternative truths and democratic practice). Additionally, this means that the ambition of collectively coming closer to truth, or as O'Reilly (2005) talked about (collective truth) as specific quality for web 2.0 is only valid within a certain community.

### **Democracy is not indispensable for Digital Naturals who know how to play the game**

Some of the most striking results from this study was that Democracy was not seen as indispensable for some of the DN's. They talked about strategic ways to side-step the formal procedures of democracy and instead of how to adapt to less transparent informal rules in order to reach her or his individualistic goals. Democracy was often portrayed as a nice utopia.

DN: I came from another culture where democracy didn't exist... I think democracy is about equal rights. But I know you don't have to have democracy to get well educated or to succeed in life. That's what my parents told me, the thoughts they had, that impacted me... So I like the thought of democracy and I think Sweden is a country who is very open to all cultures and stuff. And I think that is why Sweden is such a good country. So democracy works here, but it doesn't work everywhere...

Furthermore, when they described how to achieve these goals, they often used the terminology of game playing.

DN1: I think that once you accept that it is only a game, you join the game, but it's... I don't know, very individual. Actually it's not very democratic.

DN2: So I feel that not from like saying that democracy is bad or something, I just see it as a thing...people are not aware of it, some people are aware of it, that people with power can influence, but it's not spoken transparently, but one need to be aware of it. It's a game in the end.

DN1: Yeah, but then again it's about who has the power to set the rules.

The Digital Naturals above also put the finger on a quite salient element of the discussions in the focus groups; the individualistic approach to democracy where everyone has to find her or his strategies and ways in order to succeed. Democracy was in these cases seen not as a collective project of building a society for the common good but as a playing field where everyone has to be well informed and media literate in order to succeed. Social media and the Internet were seen as helpful tools in order to achieve personal goals that might be held by other individuals as well and therefore managed and performed all together in a pseudo-collective way.

The crucial challenge was according to the DN's to know how to play the game. Whereas some DN's felt well-informed but still powerless and thought others (media literates, digital elites and lobbyists) can impact democracy and not themselves, others put forward that they felt satisfied by staying well-informed and felt that this was good enough. Those who claimed they knew how to play the game (media literates) put forward that it is easier than before to influence and change because of the technology while others thought it is harder to influence and change because it's harder to get attention due to the information overload.

The Digital Naturals discussed the higher transparency on the internet as it increases visibility of the actions made by politicians. The higher visibility was seen as an advantage for media literates

as it was seen as a strategic tool to put pressure on politicians to act and to be accountable. They also claimed that this transparency on the Internet demanded to be handled in different and new ways.

DN1: To be strategic is to have the right feeling for transparency on the Net and to know how to handle transparency...You can't be strategic if you have no boundaries between private, business and politics...again, this is from a strategically perspective, the private life is the private life, you have the social media that is one life, and then the political sphere belongs in political sphere. But if you are... completely open on all these spheres, then how can you be strategic? Then how to make strategic choices? You can't because then you have exposed, I'm not saying that you are going to do bad things, but you still have exposed information which can contradict if you're in a....to minimize the risks.. that is to basically minimize the risk for not being exposed to things that you cannot control any longer...it would damage your reputation...

So while Digital Naturals in one sense don't seem to have any online-offline distinction anymore the distinctions between the "front stage" and the "back stage" on the Internet have become more important to handle. In fact it plays a critical role as some of them state that they actually live their lives more online than in the material world.

DN: ...with the digital media today that's what you need to be aware of. And that's what I talk about, being aware of what you are doing in the cyberspace. We live more in cyberspace than we actually live in the outside...

## **Discussion and concluding remarks**

This paper has presented how Digital Naturals understand the terms and meaning of democracy, political engagement and strategic communication in the media landscape of today. On the first research question it can be stated that the definition of what democracy is, tend to be limited to formal procedures even though DN's actually do politics in new and influential ways by directing their opinions to peers as these are described as their primary target group for communicative actions. On the second research question on how they perceive their own capabilities, results display that some of them describe themselves as media literates and when they try to direct their communication efforts to politicians they are aware of the fact that politicians may use ghost writers which is not seen as problematic as long as accountability can be guaranteed. Some of the DN's settle by being well-informed and others show low self-esteem as they don't consider themselves as being media literates and due to that powerless. When they describe what it takes to strategically communicate through social media today, they describe different strategies on how to handle transparency and they also use the terminology of game playing. Finally, when they describe the relations between publicly communicated ambitions of a revitalized civic sphere

in relation to the perceived possibilities of social media they describe the discrepancy between ambitions and reality. Digital Natives consider much of the online communication to be very far away from the idea of

the “rational man” and state that clicktivism outweighs rational discussion online. They see it as problematic that they don't check facts and sources themselves and that they often repost information that they have no knowledge of. Furthermore, they don't describe democracy as indispensable and not as a collective project of building a society for the common good but as a playing field where every individual must know the rules and how to play in order to gain personal influence and power in society.

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## ▶ 2

# The Characteristics of the E-influence of Community Managers: Issues for the E-reputation of Organizations

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### Abstract

“E-influence,” or digital influence, comes from a public assessment by new media users of the behaviors, products, and services of organizations through the widespread dissemination of professional experiences. To this public assessment is added a persistence, or an impression of crypted events, over time in the media. What characterizes this e-influence in the professional practices of community managers in social media, from the points of view of these professionals, or of the organisational opinion leaders in social media? And what impact do these characteristics have on the “e-reputation” of organizations in public opinion? This exploratory study is conducted through an inductive approach and a qualitative process, describing the approximation of social media through a sampling of public and private Quebecois organizations active in social media. In addition to a literature review, the Observatory of Social Media in Public Relations (French: OMSRP) conducted twenty semi-structured interviews with managers of these new modes of communication. The results of the research show twelve indicators of e-influence likely to have an effect on the “e-reputation” of organizations with their public, of which five stand out more significantly.

The English text of all quotes present in this text are the work of its translator, and as such should be considered “free translations,” of the original words of the authors concerned.

Keywords: Digital communication, e-influence, public relations management, social media appropriation, semi-structured interviews, community managers, opinion leaders, e-reputation.

### Introduction

This article follows an empirical study conducted by Charest and Doucet (2014) of the Observatory of Social Media in Public Relations (French: OMSRP), which focused on community leaders and issues for the “e-reputation” of organizations. The study showed the influence that leaders could have on the perception of organizations by user groups, from the ways in which sensitive or crisis communication situations were managed by these public relations professionals in social media. In this second research on social media managers, we are interested in deepening the concept of “e-reputation” starting from the characteristics of “e-influence,” a concept which is intrinsically linked to the positive or negative perception which users of new Web 2.0 platforms have towards the organizations that they evaluate publicly. As early as 1955, major work done by Lazarsfeld, and Katz and Lazarsfeld (2008) demonstrated the role of influence which opinion leaders held, as well as their impact on the decision process of people in their interpersonal networks. This influence was partly explained by socio-demographic factors related to the influencers, including an above average education, financial comfort, and frequent travels abroad; it was also explained by personality traits, notably strong interpersonal relationships that they had with a small group of people to whom they relayed information due to, among other things, their high media exposure.

Since the advent of social media, these new participatory collaborative platforms emanating from the Web 2.0 ecosystem, it must be admitted that this research preoccupation on opinion leaders and their influence remains relevant (Acar & Polonsky, 2007; Boistel, 2013, 1994; Carmen and all., 2011; Correa 2010; Domenget, 2015; Heiderich, 2009; Merzeau, 2013; Vernet & Flores, 2004). What we are interested to study is the vocabulary derived from this new mode of communication with new digital media, which is evolving towards what can today be called “e-influence,” as well as this phenomenon and its impact on “e-reputation,” a major challenge for public relations professionals and organizations.

Let us first define these two intrinsically linked concepts. According to Fayon and Alloing (2012) “e-influence” is an integral part of e-reputation, it can allow the company image to be managed offensively on the web. The goal of “e-influence” is to expand the scope of perception of Internet users with regards to your organization. In other words, it is to create new perceptions in order to disqualify the bad ones (2012, online).

Therefore, the proactive dimension in the management process of e-influence is emphasized by the authors. With regards to e-reputation, they describe it (2012: 198) as being “the expression of the opinions of web users through web-based tools (forums, social networks, blogs, etc.) The accumulation, the dissemination, and the visibility of these opinions then impact the constructed image of a brand or a product/service. “

The concept of e-reputation or global reputation is of particular concern to researchers of institutional or corporate communication. These new communication channels represent important public spaces in which the reputations of organizations are in play, according



to Libaert and Johannes (2010). Organizations are faced with a “public evaluation of their behaviors through the widespread dissemination of personal experiences. [...] To this widespread dissemination, a persistent memory of media is added, which allows access to information several years after the fact (2010:111).”

Given the importance of e-influence and the considerable effects which it can have on the reputation of organizations, it is important to study this social phenomenon, resulting notably from the “conversations” (Charest & Gauthier, 2012; Charest, Gauthier & Grenon, 2011; Bonneau, 2012) in social media, and try to identify the characteristics of e-influence from the point of view of community managers. What characterizes e-influence according to these professionals, specifically on the Facebook and Twitter platforms? And what impact does it have on the e-reputation of organizations with the user groups?

This concept is addressed through the appropriation of social media by public relations professionals, and from the point of view of these communication managers within organizations. We are interested in identifying the characteristics of e-influence in order to better understand how this influence is exercised upon users of the social platforms of organizations, through the eye of those who manage these relations in the social media of organizations.

We will proceed to conduct this exploratory study through both an inductive approach as well as a qualitative descriptive approach of social media appropriation through a sampling of active public and private Quebec organizations active in social media. In addition to the literature reviewed, we will use semi-structured interview techniques with social media managers. This exploratory study will allow the professional practices of social media managers, more precisely on Facebook and Twitter, to be described. It will also identify the characteristics inherent to e-influence from their point of view.

## Theoretical guidelines for “e-influence” and “e-reputation”

It is necessary to give a brief definition of the concepts of influence and reputation before studying the concepts of e-influence and e-reputation. Edward Bernays, in *Propaganda* (1928:8) defines influence as being “the action of a minority to shape the opinion of the majority.” In modern society, the exercise of influence is no longer the prerogative of government, but is also something that is within the reach of militant groups, businesses, and individuals, according to Fillias and Villeneuve (2001).

With regards to the concept of reputation, two schools of thought stand out: some authors define it as being an image projected by organizations and perceived by the public. Others rather define reputation as an aggregated public evaluation of images that evolve through time, and on which an organization does not always have the control desired. For example, for Fombrun (1996) reputation represents “a perception of past actions and future prospects that describes the overall attractiveness of a firm for its key audiences, compared to its competitors”

(quoted from Libaert & Johannes, 2010:45). Reputation is thus constructed through a global and evolutionary perception of an enterprise in a more extended period of time, unlike image, which is a “snapshot” at a given moment, an instant impression (Libaert & Johannes, 2010; Grunig, 1993).

For Davies (2002) and Boistel (1994), meanwhile, reputation is “composed of the affective or emotional, good or bad, weak or strong reactions of consumers, investors, employees, as well as of public opinion (quoted from Boistel 2013: online). This is what Fillias and Villeneuve (2011: 10) describe as a “projection built by others of ourselves, of an organization, or of a culture, from what these others have been told and from what they have perceived of our actions.”

In short, reputation is built by aggregating different images, public assessments, and judgements formed through time. This is what the interuniversity research group Cirano (2012:7) defines as “intangible assets built over time and which represents the value and the confidence given to an enterprise by stakeholders. It is a key element which favours the achievement of key objectives, including value creation, profitable growth, and a sustainable competitive advantage.”

Finally, it should be noted that each audience has its own perception of the reputation of an enterprise, which developed as a result of direct experience with it. This same perception is also influenced by the opinions of other publics (the population, media, and personal contacts). Thus, the Bourgogne de Cirano report (2012: online) concludes that the perception of each stakeholder is evaluated according to individual interests, priorities, and needs. In short, e-reputation can be perceived as a “new, and thus specific, management method” to which Internet users, search engines, and social network all participate, thus giving meaning to this distinction between reputation and e-reputation (Réguer, 2011: 15). For Fillias and Villeneuve (2011), influence and reputation go hand in hand because a “controlled” reputation allows for the exercise of spontaneous influence. These mechanisms also apply online.

This brings us to the more specific concepts of e-influence and e-reputation. According to Alloing and Pierre (2012), e-reputation, or online reputation, is defined as being

an intentional act of communication (as defined by Schütz) conducted by Internet users (when speaking about an entity) in a digital context. This is an act for which they are both producers and consumers of their observations, and which allows, through the linking of prior and experiential knowledge, the building of indicators (2012: online)

Fillias and Villeneuve (2001: 12) summarize the concept of e-reputation as being “all methods of study and action on digital identity.” The Internet has entered our lives as the medium of access to information par excellence, and it occupies a spotlight in the process of influence. “The web has thus become the primary medium of ‘social debate’ and thus of political influence: it shapes public opinion in the same way as television did during the sixties.”

To these shaped images is added the concept of public comments and conversations, which are an intrinsic part of the Internet culture, influencing the digital reputation of an organization, according to Libaert and Johannes (2010). Paradoxically, the organization has no control:



The network operation of communication also multiplies exponentially the potential relaying of information. If opinion leaders exist in the form of influential bloggers, experts, or personalities, each Internet user can disseminate a piece of information, whether true or false, to his or her network (2010, p. 111).

According to Boistel (2013: online), while any Internet user does indeed have the ability to become a content creator by exchanging messages on the Internet, this raises the problem of the management of e-reputation, or even of the very foundation of what an enterprise is, or what it wants to become. The theme of e-reputation thus fits in a “high proportion of communication, since the modern world is built around the issues of communication, image, and reputation.” We cannot not communicate, underlined Paul Watzlawick, an adherent of the important systemic school of thought from Palo Alto, in California. “Having admitted this,” Marzeau reminds us,

we at least thought that we “ still had the right to ignore, to retain, to interpret, or to betray a piece of information.” And yet, what digital networks demonstrate is that it is impossible to participate in information exchange while still keeping this overlooking position or, to put it more colloquially, without getting wet “ (2010 : 32-33 online).

What’s more, the control over the messages conveyed on social media has changed hand to “move from the company to any content distributor who can, even without intending to, have a major influence on the reputation of the organization” Boistel underlines (2013). It seems to us important to ask the question: What are these prescribed characteristics of e-influence which are susceptible to exercise an effective influence on the audiences of organizations?

## Indicators of e-influence

According to the literature review identified in the discipline of institutional or corporate communication, we were able to identify certain characteristics of e-influence. They stand out, on the one hand, through perceptions linked to individuals (social media managers, opinion leaders) and, on the other hand, through perceptions linked to organizations.

### Characteristics linked to individuals

With regards to perceptions linked to individuals, a study conducted by Aaker (1997) shows that a set of psychological personality traits influence the perception of people towards a brand or organization. Designated by the term “Big Five”, it consists of the following five characteristics: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness.

Applied in a specific context of research on social media users, these same characteristics linked to personality have been the subject of a study conducted by Correa and all. (2010), namely the “Big Five Model and Social Media Use.” Their three hypotheses were confirmed, that is: 1) extroverted users use social media more frequently; 2) users more open to new experiences use

social media more frequently; 3) more emotionally stable users use social media less frequently. These last two personality traits, that is to say, extroverted users and users more open to new experiences, have also been the subject of work conducted by Yongwan and all. (2013). They qualified the influence that these personality traits have in discussions on social media. According to them, less extroverted people, and people less open to new experiences, would make valuable contributions to the diversity of discussions held in a network, thus promoting less homogeneous thought.

Acar and Polonsky (2007) share some of these results with regards to extroverts and time spent online. They first study personality factors, such as self-esteem, extroversion, opinion search, opinion management, and information sharing. They underline that individuals who share these characteristics are opinion leaders on Web 2.0.

### Characteristics linked to digital behaviour

Acar and Polonsky (2007) then study the information behaviour of these influencers. They establish a correlation between opinion leadership and time spent online. “Opinion leaders spend less time online, have a smaller network, but are more likely to share information about a brand” (free translation) (cited in Alloing & Haikel-Elsabeh, 2014: online). The proximity of these results with those of Yongwan (2013) also qualifies the work of Correa and all. (2010) with regards to the extrovert factor.

The online behaviour of these opinion leaders, classified as “expert communicators” by Carmen and all. (2011: online) also interests Vernet and Flores (2004: online). In addition to the expertise and knowledge of a product or a market, for example, both groups of researchers summarize these leaders’ online behaviours by an intense sharing of content on social network, and a sharing of information regarding products or markets.

In addition to the personality and the digital behaviour of the social media manager and opinion leaders on Web 2.0, it goes without saying that the latter must also occupy a strategic position in key societal organizations, and share in important decisions. “Combining network processes allows us to understand an interesting convergence between an occupied position, notoriety, and an ability to influence. In turn, this legitimacy is reflected on that of the enterprise being led.” (free translation), underlines Appel (2005: online). In addition, she reminds us that standards of behaviour acquired in the exercise of functions “become behavioural norms for those who reach the top.” (free translation.)

For Huffaker (2010), leaders who exercise e-influence in organizations are leaders who are very active in online communication, and who use diverse means of communication. They thus enjoy credibility in a network and show empathy while exercising authority.

As for indicators of e-influence attributed specifically to organizations, a study by Marcellis and Teodoresco (2012) shows three factors linked to have a favorable or unfavorable influence on what he terms the “intangible assets” of the organization. This consists in factors linked to the credibility of the organization: its expertise in the field, the confidence that it inspires in its audiences, and finally an effective management of its communications.

Influence strategies and techniques

Influence strategies and techniques practiced by managers in social media are also the subject of studies by researchers interested by influence on the Internet. On the strategic level, Pekka (2010) recalls the main characteristic of the Internet which fostered the emergence of the Web 2.0 platforms and social media, namely its “interactive” dimension: he reminds us that social media are not a strategic channel for the dissemination of enterprise communication, but rather a place of participation in which organizations interact with the public. These interactions create impressions that are important for each organization. As such, to paraphrase, the strategy of ubiquity of organizations in social media must allow users to participate actively, or to participate in the influence and evaluation process of organizations (Pekka, 2010). These remarks were heavily emphasized by Charest (2007) in his doctoral thesis demonstrating the limits of Web 1.0 in its unidirectional function. This explains the enthusiasm of users and the emergence of Web 2.0, which gave way to an interactivity meeting an important need of users.

This participatory strategy is also recommended by Heiderich (2009) when proposing to organizations different techniques likely to exert influence on the users of their platforms. Convening internet users; interesting them with quality content that is linked to their interests; giving value to a message through the quantity and credibility of sources; and, finally, using an easy to use architecture that adds a participatory dimension to users.

This is also what Bellino (2014) recommends to promote engagement in what are good practices to develop in social media, by notably analysing users; by implicating them in all stages; by facilitating uses through ergonomic interfaces; by reassuring them; and, finally, by encouraging feedback and integration in social practices, to name but a few.

In short, indicators linked to potential leaders and digital behaviours are grouped by Alloing and Haikel-Elsabeh (2014: online) under three approaches likely to identify these characteristics, namely the structural, enunciative, and informational approaches. They link these with four functions specific to the strategic role of these leaders, namely: to make content known by generating, notably, volume, contacts, and links; to have content seen by disseminating expert contents, among others; to have content shared by rebroadcasting the content of others; and, finally, to make users react by developing, notably, a positive reputation.

In short, these indices identified in the literature, related both to organizations and managers, seem to us important to take into account during out fieldwork with social media managers whose objective is to try to identify the characteristics of e-influence from their point of view.

## Methodology

The inductive approach of this qualitative exploratory study was designed to address two objectives. The first is to describe the professional practices of social media managers. The second is to identify the characteristics of e-influence from the point of view of social media managers in public relations.

## Participants

The recruitment strategy employed allowed 20 community managers to be interviewed, of which 19 were selected. To be eligible, they had to correspond to the following three selection criteria: 1) be employed in an organization present in SM for at least two years; 2) occupy a SM manager position in an organization for between 12 to 18 months and 3) manage at least 2 platforms (e.g.: blogs, Twitter, Facebook, etc.)

Participants were initially identified through the LinkedIn platform, and through local networks. A total of 75 participant profiles were identified. Their selection was motivated by geographic location (candidates located in Quebec City or Montreal) and their experience with regards to SM management, planning, and facilitation. Participants were contacted by e-mail.

The identification period of community managers and the two pre-tests were held in December 2013. The first two interviews were included in the study because of the general lack of changes to the pre-tested grid, as well as the richness of the statements given. The interviews with the other 17 community managers were held in January, in the cities of Montreal and Quebec. The interviews were conducted in the participants' offices, by videoconference, or in the office of the Observatory of Social Media in Public Relations (French: OMSRP) of Université Laval. The software used consisted of Photobooth, Debut, and a tape recorder. Recordings were kept confidential according to the ethical standards of Université Laval.

## Materials and Procedure

The interview contents were made up of the following elements:

- 1) The objectives related to the presence of the organization on SM;
- 2) The strategies related to the presence of the organization on SM;
- 3) The uses related to the presence of the organization on SM;
- 4) The influence characteristics of an organization;
- 5) The participation of users on the platforms of the organizations studied;
- 6) The socio-demographic profile of the community manager and a description of the organization.

Data was analyzed according to the content analysis protocol (Protocol analysis, verbal reports as data) developed by Ericsson and Simon (1984). Interview notes were also created in order to qualify the statements given and the distinctive traits of the organizations.

## Results

During the semi-structured interviews with the 19 selected participants, we determined the organizational objectives linked to the presence of their employer or their clients on social media, the strategies employed, as well as their uses. The participants were also asked what they considered to be the influence characteristics of a person or an organization on SM. In this context, the results of this study help define the factors most likely to establish an influence on SM. However, before presenting the results, here is a socio-demographic profile of the participants.

### Socio-demographic profile

The sample consisted of 13 women and six men. Two thirds came from Quebec City, and one third from Montreal. Among the 19 participants selected, 12 had a position in a private enterprise, and 7 in a public organization. In order of importance, the field of activity of the organizations studied was communications (6/19), culture (3/19), public administration (3/19), catering (2/19), politics (2/19), insurance (1/19), media (1/19), and education (1/19). The size of the organizations varied between 3,000 and 5,000 employees. As for the participants, three quarters were between 24 and 34 years old, and one sixth was between 35 and 44 years old. A little more than half of the community managers have a degree in communications, and a fifth have a degree in the field of marketing and administration. Others degrees had to do with other fields, such as sociology, history, graphic design, arts, and microbiology. Reflecting our sample, the work done by Lazarsfeld (1955) as well as Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955, 2008) had already identified the dimension of “higher than average education” as one of the socio-demographic characteristics of opinion leaders.

At the time of the interviews, this study included more than 177,240 Facebook subscribers, and 155,340 Twitter subscribers. All of the organizations, except one, were present on both Facebook and Twitter (See Table 1 - The platforms used by the participants). Instagram represents the third most commonly used platform (11/19.)

### The Goals of Professional Practices

In total, participants indicated 29 different goals linked to the presence of their organizations on social media, which are categorized under the following labels: 1) disseminate information, 2) develop and keep a market, 3) create and maintain relationships, 4) interact and communicate, 5) develop a digital identity, 6) keep watch, listen, and maintain a presence.

As shown in Table 2, entitled “The Goals of Professional Practices,” the goals of public and private organizations differ in importance, with the exception of the “interacting and communicating” category, which corresponds to slightly more than 8% of the goals cited for both types of organizations. Conversely, “disseminating information” and “developing a market” are the two most popular goals, but with a clear upward trend for private enterprises. The goal most often cited by the participants from public enterprises is that linked to the development of a digital identity.

### The strategies

The results of this studies have revealed that the strategies of organizations are not as well defined as their goals. Indeed, there are not enough recurring results to underline strategic trends in the practices of community managers. However, while not necessarily mentioned in the interview, we see that the content marketing strategy is an integrated practice in 3 of the 19 organizations studied.

### Uses

As shown in Table 5, entitled “Importance Given to ...”, the dominant use is that of dissemination, followed by keeping watch, conversation, research and data collection, and sharing and collaboration. The importance given to dissemination in the practices of managers is different from the posture recommended by SM authors (Pekka, 2010; Charest, Bédard, 2013; Charest 2007; Heiderich, 2009). Given the interactive dimensions of social media, they suggested that SM managers promote participation in SM, rather than disseminate information or promote products and services.

### Influence criteria

In order to identify the characteristics of influence on social media, we asked the community managers to identify the people, organizations, brands, or all other entities present on social media who, according to them, influence their online communities. Afterwards, they were asked to identify the characteristics of these entities that show an influence on their communities. Here are, in order of importance, the most evocative characteristics for community managers:

1. Personality
2. Substantive contents
3. Omnipresence
4. Creating a community of interests and contents
5. Credibility of the entity
6. Content form
7. Creation of online contents linked to an offline event
8. Visionary
9. A large number of comments
10. First source of contents
11. Followed by a network
12. Large number of subscribers

With regards to the most important characteristic, personality, it refers, among others, to influence criteria oriented towards human characteristics, that is to say the adoption of a human tone, the presence of opinion contents which reflects an assumed personality (e.g.: funny, irreverent, controversial, positive, etc.). These personality traits are similar to those raised by Acar and Polonsky (2007) as well as those of Aaker's (1997) “Big Five Model” which was reused by Correra

and all. (2010).

The substantive contents, for their part, refer to rigorous and diversified contents that stimulate interactions, encourage experimentation of new uses and methods of communication, or which arouse curiosity. Although, according to participants, a good balance is required as to the amount of publications disseminated, content sharing represents one of the attitudes of opinion leaders identified in the work of Carmen and all. (2011) and of Vernet and Flores (2004).

The third important characteristic is that of omnipresence. This concept is defined by the omnipresence of the person or of the organization only within SM, or at the same time in SM, traditional media, and non-media spaces (e.g.: stores, conferences). As argued by Pekka (2004) and Charest (2007), the omnipresence of organizations on SM facilitates the active participation of internet users and creates interactivity with them.

The characteristic associated with the creation of a community of interests and contents is also defined by the creation of an ecosystem surrounding the brand, as well as by the creation of a community of interests, contents, or practices. In the same vein, Heiderich (2009) also recommended stimulating the interest of internet users with contents matching their interests in order to wield influence among platform users.

As for credibility, this includes both the credibility of the manager and that of the organization. With regards to that of SM managers, the literature has shown us that opinion leaders must occupy a strategic position in organizations in order to optimize their power of influence (Appel, 2005). In fact, Huffaker (2010) argued that leaders who exert an influence use diversified means of communication and also enjoy credibility within a network. With regards to the credibility of organizations, Marcellis and Teodoresco (2012) argue that the presence of key factors linked to the credibility of the organization (expertise, confidence, and communications management) act of its influence.

Finally, contrary to widespread popular belief, the characteristic that evokes influence the least is that related to the number of subscribers. Although this data is important to take into account, it must be coupled with qualitative values. This confirms that quantitative data does not define influence. Acar and Polonsky (2007) came to the same conclusion, by demonstrating that opinion leaders have a smaller network but that they are more able to share information about the brand.

### Conclusions and issues for consideration

The results of the study identified twelve characteristics inherent to the concept of e-influence from the point of view of social media managers, five of which have stood out in a more significant manner. These are, *ex aequo*, first, the personality of the manager and the substantive content that he or she generates on the organization's platforms. In second is the omnipresence of organizations in different social media, as well as in other traditional media. The creation of a community of interests and the credibility of the contents represent, respectively, the fourth and fifth characteristics. As for the number of subscribers on different organizational platforms, this dimension was ranked 12th, which is to say last, in order of importance, when it was not paired with a qualitative characteristic, such as the personality of the community manager. This data, when matched with the authors studied, shows the validity of this empirical exploratory study.

The results of this empirical study challenge us particularly when it comes to the least significant communication planning practice, which is the lack of strategy in social media by social media managers. Indeed, few managers spoke about the strategic dimension in the daily exercise of their functions on the different platforms of organizations.

Although the first social media, Facebook, has existed for around a decade, might the relative newness of this communicative practice be the reason for which it is still not fully integrated to the global communication plans of organizations? However, a NETendances study (2013: 11) conducted by the CEFRIO states that 62.1% of Quebecers follow at least one organization, enterprise, or personality on social media. The failure to develop a communication strategy on these new platforms deprives the managers, on the one hand, of the ability to interact adequately with a privileged first hand information source, and deprives them, on the other hand, of the possibility to influence in a favourable manner the perception of their public with regards to the e-reputation of their organizations.

Finally, we wonder whether these new forms of interactive and instantaneous communication, generated by a new Web 2.0 media ecosystem are planned in the short, medium, or long term. This is a matter of vision and changing communication logic which herald the end of business as usual, according to Solis (2011): "Adapt or die," he insists. Thus, might strategic planning be more easily conducted in organizations that know how to transform their ways of doing things with new tools in an integrated communication context that would better meet the needs of organizations in the 21st century context? This is a question that will guide our future work.

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**Table 1 – The platforms used by the participants.**

Plateform	Private	Public	Total
Twitter	12	7	19
Facebook	12	6	18
Instagram	7	4	11
YouTube	2	5	7
Blogue	2	4	6
Pinterest	3	2	5
Google +	3	2	5
Linkedin	3	0	3
Vimeo	1	1	2
FlickrR	1	0	1
New plat- forms	0	1	1
Foursquare	0	1	1
Tumblr	0	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>80</b>

**Table 2 – The Goals of Professional Practices**



Table 3 – Influence Characteristics

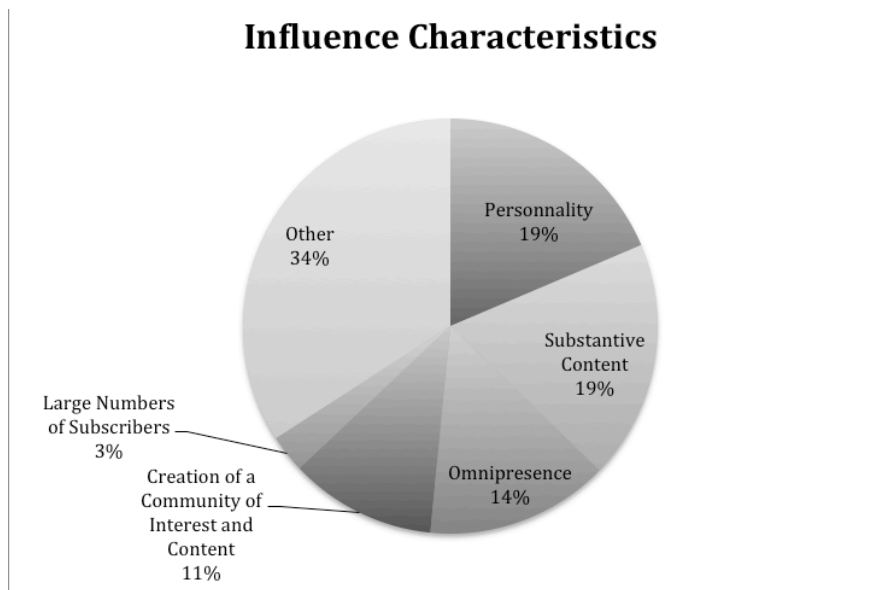


Table 5 – Importance Given to...

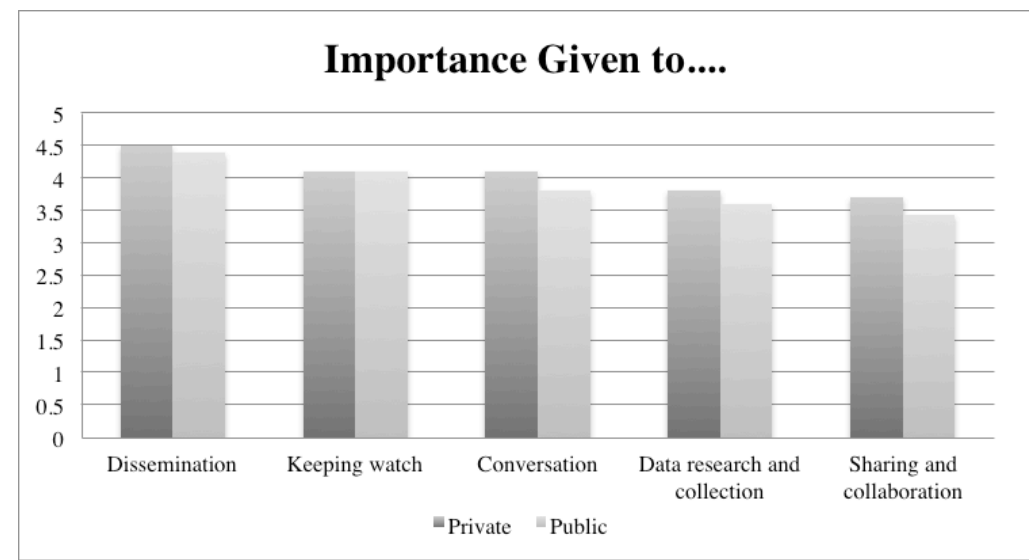


Table 4 - Characteristics by organizations (private & public)

Characteristics	Private	Public	TOTAL
Personality	8	5	13
Substantive contents	3	10	13
Omnipresence	7	3	10
Creation of a community of interest and content	2	6	8
Credibility	3	2	5
Form of the content	2	3	5
Creation of online contents linked to an offline event	4	1	5
Visionary	3	1	4
Large number of comments	1	1	2
Primary source of content	0	1	1
Followed by a network	1	0	1
Large number of subscribers	0	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>68</b>

 3

## When Diplomacy Goes Viral

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Benghazi. Tahrir Square. Uprising in Ukraine. Wikileaks. Snowden Effect.

All of these seemingly disparate terms have one thing in common: they illustrate the profound impact of the internet and social media on the course of international relations and the conduct of diplomacy in today's world.

In an effort to analyze the situation, this presentation will examine the attack by angry mobs on U.S. government facilities in Benghazi, Libya that resulted in the deaths of four American officials, the uprising on Maidan Square in Kyiv, Ukraine that ousted that country's president, and the ongoing ramifications of Wikileaks and the Snowden revelations for U.S. international affairs. It will also look at how diplomacy is adapting to meet constantly changing communications challenges.

Government institutions charged with conducting foreign relations struggle to keep up with this evolving information technology landscape. Images of crises around the world are flashed in real time on smart phones and ever powerful notebook screens, and anyone with a smart phone becomes an instant reporter. Diplomats have by now grown accustomed to using the Internet to get their message out, but what happens when they have to react quickly to other messages in cyberspace, from insurgents, militant groups, religious zealots, repressive regimes and the like?

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright observed, "All these large numbers of information systems make diplomacy much harder to carry on because the information comes in very fast and you have to make decisions much faster than you might under previous circumstances. Everybody wants an answer right away." That was 12 years ago.

Some analysts at the time coined the term "netpolitik," defining it as a new style of diplomacy that seeks to exploit the powerful capabilities of the Internet to shape politics, culture, values, and personal identity. Since then, social media has exploded: secretaries of state and ambassadors must tweet and blog to stay engaged in the public square. For the working diplomat, the balance between privacy and openness has been made vastly more complicated in the digital age.

In November 2010, Wikileaks tore the veil off of the sensitive conduct of American diplomacy by releasing a quarter of a million cables sent to the U.S. State Department by its diplomatic missions overseas. Among these voluminous reports was an analysis of the corrupt Tunisian government that helped to spark the popular Tunisian revolt just a month later. Commentators noted that this was the first time people were pushed over the brink by Wikileaks.

The Tunisian revolution in turn fueled the uprising in Cairo's Tahrir Square and similar protests throughout the Arab world. The ramifications are still being felt today. Would these revolutions have happened without the WikiLeaks revelations? Possibly. But WikiLeaks provided the spark for an already combustible environment. Are the ramifications of WikiLeaks still being felt? Yes. Former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton noted that the leaks "put people's lives in danger" and "threaten national security" Trusted sources were compromised, as were candid intra government communications.

Easily available and inexpensive information technologies vastly enabled communications among aggrieved parties via instant messaging on cell phones and not only brought them into the streets, but enabled protesters to transmit live images to CNN and other international news outlets. Self-styled blogging groups sprang up everywhere, working quickly and effectively under the radar. These new communications tools empowered young people to take action and gave them a sense that they might actually be able to change their societies for the better. Films like "The Square," documenting the Egyptian uprising, and "A Whisper to a Roar," profiling democracy activists in Egypt, Malaysia, Ukraine, Venezuela and Zimbabwe, provide excellent insights into these movements.

These citizen activists are a force to be reckoned with in international affairs and diplomatic missions have come to appreciate that they, too, must use social media to engage with these groups to truly understand their host nations. Foreign diplomats posted to Washington, D.C. are keenly aware that they must be in the public square in the U.S. to represent their country's interests effectively.

Former Mexican Ambassador Arturo Sarukhan, who writes extensively on diplomacy in the digital age, proudly notes that he was the first envoy in Washington to "tweet" in his official capacity. He observes that we have witnessed "an exponential rise in the multiplicity of non-state actors" playing a "major role in domestic politics and foreign affairs," and that the "growing international activism of subnational authorities— whether state or local— and of civil society as a whole...has marked the global interaction of our times."

When the internet and social media inspire and help citizens to take action against injustice, it's usually a good thing. But these same instant communications vehicles can have negative and dangerous consequences as well. In the summer of 2012, an Egyptian-born Coptic Christian living in Southern California wrote and produced a trailer for an anti-Islamic video entitled, "Innocence of

Muslims,” said to be about the mistreatment of Christians in Egypt. The actors in this amateurish film were told they were being hired for a film called “Desert Warrior,” described as a “historical Arabian Desert film.” At the post production stage, material denigrating Mohammed was added.

Video clips were posted on YouTube that July, and by September, had been dubbed into Arabic. Excerpts were broadcast on September 8 on a conservative Egyptian TV station, which also noted that Terry Jones, the virulently anti-Muslim Florida pastor of a small, nondenominational Christian church who in 2011 had staged a public burning of the Koran, was promoting the film. The U.S. Embassy in Cairo issued a statement condemning “the continuing effort by misguided individuals to hurt the religious feelings of Muslims— as we condemn efforts to offend believers of all religions.”

On September 11, the 11th anniversary of the terrorist attacks in the U.S., the video sparked a terrible and tragic chain of events. First, there were violent protests in Egypt. Demonstrators climbed over the walls of the U.S. Embassy, tore down the American flag and replaced it with a black flag inscribed with Muslim emblems. The Embassy later issued a statement on Twitter, “sorry, but neither breaches of our compound or angry messages will dissuade us from defending freedom of speech AND criticizing bigotry.”

The video clip was shown on Libyan TV and went viral in the Muslim world, leading to hundreds of injuries and over 50 deaths, including the U.S. Ambassador to Libya, Christopher Stevens, the first killing of a U.S. envoy in the line of duty in 33 years. Stevens had arrived in Benghazi the day before to meet with government officials and members of the various factions there. The attack on the U.S. facility in Benghazi that day continues to haunt the Obama Administration and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the likely next Democratic Party candidate for President. What happened in Benghazi has been the subject of extensive analysis and commentary in the media, think tanks, and at least five Congressional commissions.

Was it a pre-planned terrorist attack or a spontaneous demonstration fueled in part by the anti-Islam video? Should the U.S. facility (it was not a consulate) in Benghazi have had more security? Were there warning signs that went unheeded? What measures should be taken to avoid such tragedies in the future? These are the questions that have been debated for going on two years now. One general conclusion is that the video was definitely a catalyst that harmed U.S. interests worldwide.

While YouTube blocked the video voluntarily in Egypt and Libya, and in several other countries with sizable Muslim populations due to local laws, it was not completely removed from YouTube until February, 2014, and only then by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit based on a complaint filed by an actress in the film who claimed she was misinformed as to the use of the

film. This clash of First Amendment rights vs. national security is very hard for foreign audiences to understand.

The debate has been exacerbated over the past year as a result of National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden’s “whistleblowing” revelations of that agency’s massive global surveillance of foreign nationals, and U.S. citizens. American eavesdropping on foreign leaders, even our closest allies, has strained relations with those allies at a time when the U.S. needs their support on critical foreign policy issues. Russia’s granting of asylum to Snowden made the already-cold U.S.-Russia relationship even worse.

President Obama stated in January, 2014, “If any individual who objects to government policy can take it into their own hands to publicly disclose classified information, then we will not be able to keep our people safe, or conduct foreign policy.”

At the same time, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry noted that in some cases, the NSA had gone too far in some of its surveillance activities, and promised that it would be stopped.

Hailed as a hero by prestigious news organizations in the U.S. and Europe, Snowden has received numerous honors and awards, including being named “person of the year” by Time Magazine and Britain’s The Guardian, topping Foreign Policy magazine’s 2013 list of leading Global Thinkers, and getting the “whistleblower prize” from the Association of German Scientists. But the negative impact on American IT providers such as Google, Cisco and A.T.&T. has been profound, with some analysts predicting a \$35 billion loss for the U.S. cloud computing industry, and stepped up efforts by other countries to break up the internet into national subsets.

In the hands of authoritarian regimes, such control deprives nascent civil society groups of the ability to organize and take action. This past winter, tweets and texts united tens of thousands of protestors in Kyiv and across Ukraine decrying their government’s bowing to pressure from Russia to abandon a Partnership Agreement with the EU. As events played out, in early February, U.S. diplomats were caught in an embarrassing situation when a phone call between the Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and the American Ambassador to Ukraine was recorded and posted to YouTube by the Kremlin, thus fueling Russian claims that the U.S. was masterminding the protests and transition process to put a pro-Western leader at the helm in Ukraine.

Fast breaking events led the two seasoned diplomats to exercise poor judgment in their use of easily intercepted cell phones for these sensitive conversations. Victoria Nuland’s “F\*ck the EU” comment was not at all helpful in garnering the support of U.S. allies. With Russia’s broadcast media completely under government control (save for one small radio station in Moscow) the leaked phone call was headlined and posted on websites as proof of U.S. meddling in Ukraine’s



affairs to the detriment of Russia. Several weeks later, Putin sent troops into Crimea and by March 18, had annexed the peninsula, sovereign territory of Ukraine, signing the “official” documents in a triumphal ceremony at the Kremlin.

And the drumbeat of Russian disinformation continues, giving Putin virtual message control in claiming that Russian speakers in Ukraine’s east were being threatened and therefore Russian intervention was justified. Even in this internet age, television is the main source of news for Russians. A recent poll by Moscow’s leading opinion research organization stated that 94 percent of the population relied on domestic TV for news about Ukraine. To reach audiences abroad, Russian investment in its global TV channel, Russia Today, or “RT,” increased from \$30 million at its founding in 2005 to \$150 million just three years later, and was estimated to have reached \$200 million by 2012.

RT has more viewers in Britain than Euronews, and recently surpassed CNN in terms of clips viewed on YouTube. Polished paid editorial supplements in a host of leading newspapers in the U.S. and Europe are also part of the Russian official media blitz.

Envoys need media savvy to play in this field. The U.S. Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, fell into the trap of losing his temper in response to Russian TV asking questions and filming as he walked into a meeting with a leading human rights activist in Moscow. In embarrassingly bad Russian, he calls Russia a “wild” country and accuses Russian TV of hacking his phone and his schedule. Once again, social media gave the cringe-inducing incident wide play throughout Russia. McFaul fought back gamely via Twitter, but faced an uphill struggle in that hostile environment, and left his post right after the Sochi Olympics to return to his former academic home at California’s Stanford University.

Concerned that Ukrainian grassroots protests and calls for honest government and greater economic opportunity might spill into Russia, and acutely aware of social media’s power as a communications tool, the Putin government is cracking down on the web. A new Russian law requires popular online services to register with the government, making it easier for authorities to monitor the “fifth column,” as Putin calls it.

As a New York Times report of May 6 commented, “If innovations like Twitter were hailed as recently as the Arab uprisings as the new public square, governments like those in China, Pakistan, Turkey, Iran and now Russia are making it clear that they can deploy their tanks on virtual squares, too.”

How does today’s diplomat navigate this brave new world?

In a recent study entitled, *The Paradox of U.S. Public Diplomacy: Its Rise and ‘Demise,’* George

Washington University Professor Bruce Gregory posits that diplomacy’s public dimension is now central to what all diplomatic actors think and do. Gregory cites the following as radical changes in today’s diplomatic environment:

- power diffusion and unclear boundaries between foreign and domestic;
- many more actors, people and issues, with diplomacy taking place in layers above, below and beyond the state;
- new technologies are relevant to all aspects of diplomacy’s public dimension;
- changing diplomatic roles require entrepreneurial and innovative diplomats with broad issue awareness, and a whole of government approach, privileging research, shared knowledge and strategic planning.

Professor Gregory’s report provides a useful comparison chart highlighting “old” and “new” practices in diplomacy’s public dimension:

DIPLOMACY’S PUBLIC DIMENSION	
Legacy Concepts and Practice	21 <sup>st</sup> Century Concepts and Practice
Clear boundaries between foreign and domestic, states and civil society	Permeable and non-existent boundaries, power diffusion
State-to-state diplomacy	Polycentric diplomacy—above, below, and beyond the state
Established rules and norms	Emerging rules and norms
Fewer diplomatic actors, fewer people, fewer issues	More diplomatic actors, more people, more issues
Industrial age technologies—print, radio, television—hierarchical, one-to-many	Digital age technologies—traditional & social media—networked, many-to-many
Less information, more attention	More information, less attention
Foreign ministries—gatekeepers, primary actors in foreign affairs	Whole of government diplomacy—foreign ministries as subsets, important but not primary
War on the battlefield—between state actors	Armed conflict among the people—between state and non-state actors
Public diplomacy—episodic and peripheral	Diplomacy’s public dimension—enduring and central
Government to people public diplomacy	Many state, regional, sub-state, and civil society actors in diplomacy’s public dimension
Persuade in “wars of ideas”—meta-narratives.	Understand, influence, engage, and collaborate in global public spheres—multiple narratives.

Gregory, B. (2014 February) *The Paradox of U.S. Public Diplomacy: Its Rise and “Demise”*

Mexican diplomat Arturo Sarukhan elaborates on Gregory's points with specific reference to digital diplomacy, stating that it "needs to take into account new processes and practices that are already changing core diplomatic and public policy tasks in three relevant ways:

Listen and analyze: social media has become one of the greatest tools to gather and analyze information and to take stock of unfolding developments;

Correct and impact: social media allows one's voice to be heard and to confront or change narratives, reporting or spin, and to conduct outreach and cultural diplomacy in an effective and far-reaching manner;

Empower and transform: social media provide new avenues for foreign ministries and embassies to try to influence developments on the ground, empower civil society and NGO's, and foster openness and change.

Sarukhan's points illustrate why Russia, China and other autocratic governments are so keen to control the internet and social media internally, while at the same time using these vehicles to communicate their message to the world.

How is the U.S. diplomatic community responding to social media challenges?

Australian analyst Fergus Hanson writes in his report, "Baked In and Wired: e diplomacy@state," that today's U.S. State Department is the leader in "e diplomacy," also termed "21st Century Statecraft," which he defines as, "the use of the internet and new Information Communications Technologies to help carry out diplomatic objectives." Silicon Valley IT experts provide advice and expertise, and a staff of about 150 full-time staff work on e diplomacy-related issues. At this point, the greatest progress has been in the knowledge management area, focused on more effective internal information sharing on organizational and management issues and providing in-house virtual platforms for problem solving.

A second priority is building expertise in technology policy and the way the internet impacts economics, and social and political movements worldwide, with grants-funding to assist civil society activists in repressive regimes in work-arounds to internet restrictions.

The third priority, the use of social media by American diplomats, is expanding rapidly in terms of global audience reached, which stood at 8 million in January of 2012 and grew to 15 million by August, 2012. Hanson attributes this rapid growth to the use of "diplo media," which he describes as having three core qualities:

- Content that seeks to advance broad national interests;
- An editorial approach that downplays associations with the State Department or U.S. government;
- Content that is participatory and towards the entertainment end of the content spectrum.

Some argue that while there is plenty of activity, a strategic framework for the most effective use of social media is needed, along with more results measurement and analysis.

This schematic offers a useful roadmap for strategic communications planning:

**FIGURE 2** Strategic Planning in Diplomacy's Public Dimension



Gregory, B. (2014 February). The Paradox of U.S. Public Diplomacy: Its Rise and "Demise," IPDGC Special Report #1, George Washington University

There are increasing signs that this type of intellectual and strategic framework marks the acceptance and integration of the internet and social media into the conduct of foreign policy. Large and small nation states have learned that social media cannot be avoided. Now the challenge is to hone the skills and approaches for using information technologies to the best advantage. Those diplomats and foreign ministries that study and apply these powerful media tools in their daily work have a greater chance of success in the conduct of 21st Century statecraft.

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## ▶ 4

# Between Big Brother and Big Data How Our Networking Culture Depends on More Openness — and Exposes Us to More Risk

By Mark E. Dillen, CEO, Dillen Associates LLC

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In barely twenty years, the world's commerce and communications have become extraordinarily dependent on the digital platforms of the Internet, transforming the way we live. As developed societies have embraced these tools, from e-banking to social media to entertainment, the world's information and knowledge base has expanded exponentially; individuals can now access more information — more rapidly — than was ever before thought possible.

The impact on international relations and international communications has been profound. "Closed" societies are no longer impermeable; "open" societies daily confront determined surveillance and cyber attacks from foreign intelligence agencies, industrial spies and criminal groups.

As the Edward Snowden case has made clear, the United States is employing powerful and sophisticated technology to intercept and analyze huge amounts of digital international communications in the interest of its national security. Other countries are pursuing similar programs.

But that's not all. Large private commercial companies are collecting huge amounts of data on their customers and potential customers for marketing and credit purposes. This information, considered confidential, is also at risk of being stolen, altered or inadvertently made public.

Today we are confronting a series of challenges: How can a proper balance be found between national security and personal privacy? How can we keep governments from abusing their

<sup>1</sup> "Big Data: The next frontier for innovation, competition, and productivity," McKinsey Global Institute, May 2011.

capacity to conduct cyber surveillance while allowing them to pursue their legitimate task of seeking intelligence that might defeat various threats? As individuals and consumers, how can we enjoy the convenience and connectedness of social media and e-commerce without entirely sacrificing our personal privacy or risking identity or data theft? Finally, what are the implications of this privacy v. security dilemma for the work that we do as public relations professionals in the international arena?

In just the past few years, the large-scale collection of information by government and corporations has expanded exponentially.

### “Big Brother”

On the “Big Brother” side of the equation, the Snowden case has revealed with considerable detail a fast-evolving technological effort that was until very recently highly classified and unknown to the public.

As we now know, the U.S. government’s National Security Agency (NSA) receives huge amounts of data from US-based wireless telephone companies, such as Verizon, AT&T, etc. The Bulk Telephony Metadata Program — revealed by the Snowden leaks in 2013 — collects billions of phone numbers used in phone calls. The aim is to detect US numbers used to call foreign numbers associated with terrorist groups; foreign phone numbers associated with terrorist groups used to call numbers within the U.S.; and possible terrorist-related communications between phone numbers inside the United States.

Separately, the US National Security Agency (NSA) collects millions of facial images off of Web-based media. As the New York Times put it:

It is not clear how many people around the world, and how many Americans, might have been caught up in the effort. Neither federal privacy laws nor the nation’s surveillance laws provide specific protections for facial images. Given the N.S.A.’s foreign intelligence mission, much of the imagery would involve people overseas whose data was scooped up through cable taps, Internet hubs and satellite transmissions.

...the N.S.A. would be required to get court approval for imagery of Americans collected through its surveillance programs, just as it must to read their emails or eavesdrop on their phone conversations, according to an N.S.A. spokeswoman. Cross-border communications in which an American might be emailing or texting an image to someone

targeted by the agency overseas could be excepted.

Many, many people in the United States are concerned about this — there have been legal challenges — and there is proposed legislation in Congress — passed in May by the U.S. House of Representatives and nearly passed by the Senate in November — to limit this practice. It is one of the very few things that many Republicans and Democrats agree on. This because public opinion is forcing them to agree — as Pew polling data indicate.

Having said that, the breathtaking speed and scope of these surveillance initiatives point to a spectacular jump in technological abilities that has left our judicial and legislative branches struggling to catch up.

U.S. District Court Judge Richard J. Leon, in a legal opinion in December 2013, wrote that this technology would have seemed like “science fiction” 30 years ago. “This almost Orwellian technology...enables the Government to store and analyze the phone metadata of every telephone user in the United States”. With so many mobile, smart phones, “The metadata from each person’s phone reflect a wealth of detail...an entire mosaic — a vibrant and constantly updating picture of a person’s life.”<sup>4</sup>

The U.S. Supreme Court was even more explicit in a unanimous decision rendered in June 2014 that struck down the practice of police being allowed to look at information in a suspect’s smart phone without having a search warrant. So much information is stored on our mobile devices, they said, that allowing someone to sift through it for incriminating information is akin to someone “ransacking [your] house.” “A decade ago officers might have occasionally stumbled across a highly personal item such as a diary, but today many of the more than 90 per cent of American adults who own cell phones keep on their person a digital record of nearly every aspect of their lives.”<sup>5</sup>

### Big Data

But the government is not the only one collecting metadata. Every month, 2.5 billion photos are uploaded onto Facebook where a total of 30 billion pieces of content are shared every month. Every day, 400 million Tweets are posted on Twitter.

Extremely powerful computers at Google, Yahoo and elsewhere are constantly in the service of advertisers who are analyzing massive amounts of data to determine how better to market products to you, influence your tastes and sell information about you to those willing to pay for it.

In June 2014, Facebook revealed that it had carried out an experiment in 2012 with a half million of

2 “NSA Collecting Millions of Faces from Web Images,” New York Times, May 31, 2014

3 Pew Research Center, July 17-21, 2013.

4 Klayman v. Obama, U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, December 16, 2013.

5 Riley v. California, U.S. Supreme Court, June 25, 2014.

Facebook's one billion members — manipulating the data they received to see whether Facebook members would post happier messages in response to seeing happy news items posted by others.

The purpose of the so-called experiment, which provoked alarm among privacy advocates, was to measure the “emotional impact” of Facebook. It can be safely assumed that findings on the emotional impact of Facebook would likely serve the purpose of marketing commercial products more effectively via Facebook.

Short of going “off the grid” altogether, you have very little ability to eliminate this remarkable analytical effort by “Big Data” to process information about your identity and habits — and seemingly, even your moods.

Add to this the malevolent activity of hackers. 128 million users of eBay, the resale giant, may have had their passwords stolen in May. Late last year, 110 million customers of the Target retail chain had their personal information stolen by hackers, including their names, addresses, email address, phone numbers and even the PIN numbers of their debit cards. And the U.S. Government claims, in a formal Justice Department indictment of a notorious unit of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, that the PLA has been consistently hacking into major U.S. corporations in Western Pennsylvania to steal corporate secrets. Other hackers — representing governments or terrorists and constantly changing their virtual points of cyberattack — aim at taking down our basic energy, transportation and financial infrastructure. As the noted media commentator Fareed Zaharia put it, “You cannot defend against cyber terrorism, cyber theft, cyber warfare without allowing the U.S. government some access to the telecom and computer systems.” The same goes for the governments of other technologically advanced societies.

The Snowden revelations showed foreign governments where they had lagged behind U.S. intelligence agencies in tapping into the Internet. And it showed them which US-based private international telecommunications giants were cooperating with the NSA. Now, these governments are asking Google, Microsoft and Yahoo for the same access that the NSA was given, and threatening to come down hard on the Big Data companies if they don't get it. Just last week, Germany canceled a contract with Verizon, citing Verizon's prior cooperation with the US Government. So far, the Internet giants have adopted the strategy of making less data available to all governments, and encrypting their data so that it is harder for the NSA and other agencies to break in through the IT virtual “back doors.”<sup>6</sup>

The American, European — and even Chinese — economies have become so dependent on Internet commerce — and their societies so devoted to Internet social media — that the huge digital universe seems at once fundamental to our welfare and the source of our greatest

vulnerabilities.

A look at recent polling in the United States underlines this sense of public unease. In one poll:<sup>7</sup>

- Ninety-percent of Americans agreed that a safe and secure Internet was crucial to US' economic security.
- Fifty-nine percent said their job was dependent on a safe and secure Internet; 79 percent said losing Internet access for 48 consecutive hours would be disruptive and 33 percent said it would be extremely disruptive.
- Ninety-percent said they did not feel completely safe from viruses, malware and hackers while on the Internet.

And again, turning back to the Pew study from last year,

- a majority of Americans — 56% — said that federal courts failed to provide adequate limits on the telephone and internet data the government is collecting as part of its anti-terrorism efforts.” And an even larger percentage (70%) believed that the government was using this data for purposes other than investigating terrorism.”
- 47% said their greater concern about government anti-terrorism policies is that they have gone too far in restricting the average person's civil liberties, while 35% say they are more concerned that policies have not gone far enough to protect the country.

This was the first time in Pew Research polling that more Americans expressed concern over civil liberties than protection from terrorism since the question was first asked in 2004. Thus, it seems likely that, with respect to the American public, that there is an increasing sense of digital vulnerability from these multiple sources. First, a sense that government surveillance has gone too far; second, a belief that powerful search engines and social media do not sufficiently protect privacy; third, that malevolent on-line actors present a daily risk to the individual user.

### Rebalancing Act

Already, we can see signs of a movement to restore more citizen control over metadata and personal data. In Europe, the European Union's Court of Justice recently decided to require Google to make it possible for individuals to petition to have their Web histories altered. In technical terms, the ruling establishes that any search engine must be regarded as a “data controller” under the data protection laws in those EU countries where it establishes a branch to promote and sell advertising. Data protection lawyers said the ruling meant that Google could no longer be regarded legally as a “neutral intermediary.”



Hundreds of EU citizens have already queued up to demand their “right to be forgotten” on the Internet but, of course, it is not that simple. The court made clear that there is a balancing public interest defense against deletion, especially if the individual is involved in public life.

Interpreting the EU court ruling will be a messy business, but it is clear that a public interest in individual privacy must now be acknowledged. As Judge Leon of the District Court in Washington said in his ruling last December, “...some may assume that these cultural changes will force people to reconcile themselves to an inevitable diminution of privacy that new technology entails...I think it is more likely that these trends have resulted in a greater expectation of privacy and a recognition that society views that expectation as reasonable...”

The evolution of the international communications environment will have to take into account the many hazards for individuals, publics and states. For public relations professionals, the issue is not just a matter of adapting to “New Media.” The ability to shape and influence through communications depends upon the viability of the communications channels. It may be that various threats to the integrity of communications — through surveillance, censorship and theft — may undermine the very networking culture of openness that we have come to rely upon.

Considering the American and European publics, I conclude that they really want it all: they want the convenience of Internet commerce, the connectedness of social media, individual control over access to their personal data, surveillance of threatening foreign groups, and security from hackers, foreign and domestic. Getting all of this in a balanced and constitutional way will be very difficult, however, and compromises — particularly in setting limits on government power — will have to be made.

Protecting basic freedoms in democratic societies is something that public relations professionals can and should encourage. We know the power of on-line advertisements and 30-second television spots in the service of corporate clients. We understand the importance to governments of getting out their messages in crisis situations. Beyond this, PR professionals need to help our societies understand that they face big challenges from Big Brother and Big Data — and that they, alongside legal and public interest groups — should support citizens by giving them the tools they need to form and articulate the broad public interest.

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### Corporate vs. non-profit social media guidelines: an empirical evaluation

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#### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the main characteristics of social media guidelines (SMG) of profit and nonprofit organizations and determine whether organizations communicate these guidelines effectively to employees and volunteers. We use content analysis to analyze fifty social media guidelines based on a framework formerly used to assess business documents and ethical codes. The results indicate the majority of guidelines received average scores, which implies they barely manage to stimulate change, direct action, provide facts or emphasize the importance of building trust. From a practical perspective, this research provides marketing professionals with a framework to analyze the organizations’ SMGs to reveal gaps, point to opportunities for improvement or take the findings into account when developing new guidelines.

**Keywords:** social media guidelines, CVF, nonprofit, corporate

## Introduction

In the past 15 years, social media gave rise to the consumer that is no longer a passive observer. As Berthon et al. (2012) pointed out, the changes in the locus of power, activity and value point to the need to rethink the way organizations approach the customers. In other words, marketing had to transform from the more “traditional” unidirectional, broadcasting-based marketing to an approach based on interactivity, personalization, real-time and collaboration with a community of users (see Kozinets et al., 2010).

In this context, a new organizational dilemma emerges: should all employees or volunteers be encouraged and permitted to participate in social media? If so, how can we guide their participation? This dilemma should not be taken lightly; as employees and volunteers are often considered to be the most valuable asset in social media strategies (see Bernoff & Schadler, 2010; Briones, Kuch, Liu, & Jin, 2011). Given the raising interest in social media, organizations soon realized that their social media presence requires rules, regulations and instructions of use in order to effectively and consistently communicate the organization's values (see also Vaast and Kaganer, 2013). It has been argued that all employees (as opposed to only those working in the marketing or communication departments) should be allowed access and participation, provided that there are guidelines in place that regulate each group's participation and responsibilities (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). This point is emphasized by other authors as well – Kane et al. (2009) for example, stress that appropriate standards and policies can help articulate the companies' expectations regarding the social media presence, as well as help govern its usage. This point, however, while important and critical for an organization's social media success, has only recently been addressed in the literature. For example Vaast and Kaganer (2013) emphasize the importance of a more detailed examination and understanding of organizations' attempts at social media governance.

The main purpose of this paper is twofold. First, we aim to examine corporate and non-profit social media guidelines in order to determine their main characteristics and the degree to which these two types of organizations communicate their social media guidelines effectively to employees and/or volunteers. Second, we contrast the findings with respect to profit vs. non-profit organizations to examine if there are any patterns that emerge. Even though the exploration of social media guidelines and policies has received some attention in recent years (see for example Fuduric & Mandelli, 2014; Vaast & Kaganer, 2013), we build and expand on their research. Contrary to the approach of Vaast and Kaganer (2013) who explore how social media guidelines reflect affordances as action potentials of social media in organizations, our main focus is on understanding how are social media guidelines being communicated to employees and/or volunteers, more specifically, the degree of information, instruction, structure and incentive they provide to employees and/or volunteers.

## Literature review

### Social media

Since the mid-1990s the term “digital revolution” became frequently used to refer to the rapid changes in technology that have had a deep impact on marketing theory and practice. This becomes even more evident if we observe the changing role of the Internet in marketing strategies, that have experienced major changes over the years (Varadarajan & Yadav, 2009). What first started as an attempt to use the Internet for the purposes of revenue generation, disintermediation and communication of web site content, later became a matter of achieving value chain efficiencies through cost reductions and building and enhancing customer and channel relationships (Barwise & Farley, 2005; Sultan & Rohm, 2004).

During the 2000s, the emergence of social media has only further emphasized this point. Conceptually, social media draws on the fundamental concepts of web 2.0 and UGC. As such, social media dominantly reflects the social component and content creation, consumption and distribution. Therefore it is no surprise that the majority of social media definitions link social media to Web 2.0 as its technological foundation, and stress its main feature – the facilitation of interactions and collaboration. For example, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as “...a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (p. 61). In a similar vein, social media has been defined from a communication perspective. For example, Howard and Parks (2012, p. 359) define social media as “consisting of the information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content that has individual value but reflects shared values; the content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, ideas, that become cultural products; and the people, organizations and industries that produce and consume both the tools and the content”.

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2013) argue that social media has had such a profound impact on marketing and business as a whole, that marketing scholars have yet to explore and understand. A good comparison between the “old” and “new” marketing is depicted by a bowling vs. pinball metaphor presented by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010), in which “old” marketing is like bowling where the company uses traditional instruments (represented by the bowling ball) to influence their consumers. Once released, the bowling ball will travel in a single direction to reach the target. The “new” marketing in a social media environment however, resembles a somewhat chaotic game of pinball where the balls bounce back in different directions based on consumer interactions and feedback (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). In this new environment, there is less control and a lot more uncertainty. In the bowling metaphor, the marketer's task was to release the ball and evaluate the result. With the pinball metaphor, the marketer not just releases the ball; he also uses the flippers to keep the game going as long as possible, and carefully observes what is going on as the ball bounces around. This example clearly shows that social media marketing is a complex game that requires a different approach. As Malthouse and Hofacker (2010) conclude – “... the interactive media is still in its “adolescence”, its role will continue to increase in communicating

with customers, distributing products and services, inspiring new products, managing customer relationships and creating new marketing strategies” (p. 183).

**Corporate vs. Nonprofit use of social media**

Over the years, a growing body of literature has emerged that explores the different ways corporations use social media. What initially started as a social interaction and communication tool now spans across all areas of business. For example, researchers suggest marketers can utilize social media as part of the process of value co-creation (Curtis et al., 2010), to foster dialogue (Cova, 1997; Rybalko and Seltzer, 2010), spur innovation (Füller, Jawecki, & Mühlbacher, 2007; Hamilton & Hewer, 2010; Tapscott & Williams, 2006), build social presence (Kozinets et al., 2010) and develop long-term profitable relationships (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; E. C. Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege, & Zhang, 2013; Trainor, Andzulis, Rapp, & Agnihotri, 2013)). Moreover, the extensive company use of social media has led to the emergence of enterprise social media and the social business where social media is not only used for external communication, but also for internal communication and is embedded in all aspects of the business (Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013).

While many corporations have been at the forefront of social media adoption and use, nonprofit organizations seem to fall behind in the usage of various social media platforms to meet their objectives. Several authors highlighted the benefits social media bring to nonprofit organizations. For example, can use social media to streamline their management functions, interact with stakeholders and educate others about their programs and services (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). These benefits are particularly interesting if we consider the budget constraints many nonprofits are often faced with (Curtis et al., 2010). Finally, social media can help nonprofits develop stronger, deeper relationships with their stakeholders, but also in organizing around different causes through mutual collaborations (Briones et al., 2011).

However, Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas (2009) have found that many nonprofits fail to utilize the interactive function of social media and fall behind in social media adoption. It has been argued that nonprofits dominantly use social media to “relay information using one-way communication” (Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012, p. 316). Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) reported similar results in their analysis of nonprofit organizations’ social media utilization, classified in three broad categories based on their primary function: information sharing, community building or action seeking, and found that information sharing is still the dominant primary function of social media for nonprofit organizations.

**Organizational social media policies and guidelines**

Regardless of the challenges organizations face, there seems to be a general belief that all employees (as opposed to only those working in the marketing or communication departments) should be allowed access and participation in the organization’s social media platforms provided that there are guidelines in place that regulate each groups’ participation and responsibilities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kane et al., 2009). It has been argued that various policies are especially essential when it

comes to IT governance, because they play an important role in shaping employees’ perceptions and expectations, but also help in developing a shared understanding of the possibilities, pros and cons (Huang, Singh, & Ghose, 2011; Vaast & Kaganer, 2013). In this context, organizational policies refer to all documents that outline the guiding principles related to a specific topic (e.g. privacy policy or IT use) that are designed by senior management to shape employees’ actions, behaviors and perceptions (Vaast & Kaganer, 2013). For the purpose of our research, we define social media guidelines as “a set of instructions, policies and recommended practices set forth by the organization in order to guide the employee’s personal and professional presence in various social media platforms” (see also Fuduric & Mandelli, 2014).

**Method**

**Research questions guiding the study**

This study aimed at answering the following questions:

1. Which transformational, instructional, informational and relational aspects can be found in the social media guidelines?
2. Are there any significant differences between profit and non-profit social media guidelines, and how can these be explained?

**Method of analysis**

Content analysis was used to examine the organizations’ social media guidelines based on the adapted Competing Values Framework (CVF). The CVF framework was formerly used to assess business and ethical codes, as well as other types of business documents such as business and sales presentations; privacy policies etc. (see for example Stevens, 1996; Fuduric and Mandelli, 2014) and was therefore considered suitable for this study. The framework consists of four quadrants (i.e. transformational, instructional, informational and relational) that are defined based on 12 descriptors (see Figure 1).

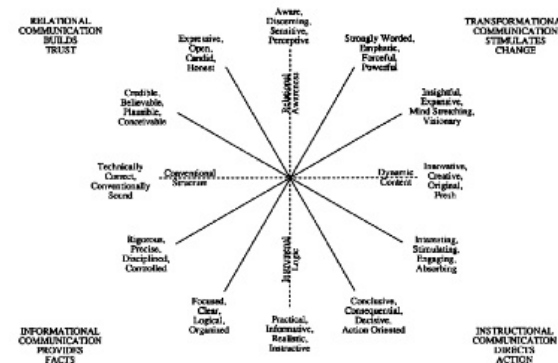


Figure 1: Competing Values Framework  
Source: Quinn et al. (1991)

Each document can be examined by scoring it on each of the individual rays on a 1-7 point scale, revealing its strengths and weaknesses depending on the obtained score. For example, if a document scores low on practical, informative, realistic it suggests that the analyzed document does not provide the employees with enough information on a given topic and is unable to resolve possible dilemmas by providing relevant facts and details. On the other hand, if the document scores high on innovative, creative, original it suggests a lot of creative and, perhaps, strategic thinking and encourages the employees to be fresh and original and “think outside the box” (Stevens, 1996). The lower right quadrant, labeled „Instructional“ represents documents high on instrumental logic and dynamic content, with descriptors such as conclusive, consequential, decisive, action oriented, interesting, stimulating, engaging and absorbing. The lower left, „Informational“ quadrant represents presentations high on conventional structure and instrumental logic and includes descriptors such as rigorous, precise, disciplined, controlled, focused, clear, logical and organized. Hence, the main purpose of such documents is to provide facts and details about the topic in question. Finally, the upper left „Relational“ quadrant, represents documents high on conventional structure and relational awareness.

#### Unit of analysis and sampling method

The unit of analysis is social media guidelines of various companies and non-profit organizations. The criterion for the selection of organizational guidelines was twofold: first, organizations of interest were identified based on Fortune's 500 list of companies. Second, a Google search was conducted using a predefined set of keywords to identify which of those companies published their social media guidelines online. A similar approach, based on the list published by The Non-profit Times, was used to identify non-profit social media guidelines to be examined in this study. This search resulted in twenty-five corporate and twenty-five non-profit guidelines that entered further analysis (see Appendix for a complete list).

#### Coding procedure

Each identified guideline was examined by two coders, and rated on a 1-7 point scale for twelve descriptors that were adopted from the CVF framework (see appendix for the coding instrument). Additionally, the coders kept notes and comments for each guideline that facilitated further analysis. The issue of interpretability of the features in CVF, more specifically, the differences in individual interpretations of the descriptors and their rating on a 1-7 point scale which can be highly subjective, was resolved by training the coders. The coders were first introduced to the concept of the CVF, its significance and structure, followed by three two-hour sessions of more intensive trainings during which the coders were given a comprehensive list of all features (descriptors), their respective definitions and examples in order to bring subjective interpretations to a minimum. Finally, the raters practiced the rating process on a separate set of guidelines that were not included in the research sample.

## Results

The results were tabulated by averaging the coding for each of the twelve descriptors for a given guideline. The next step included calculating the means for each of the four quadrants. The quadrant scores could range from four (low) to twenty-eight (high). More specifically, if a guideline received a score of twenty-eight, it meant that both coders assigned the guidelines with the highest possible score of seven, across all four sets of descriptors. Similarly, if a guideline received the minimum score of four, it means both coders assigned the guideline a score of 1, across all four sets of descriptors. Upon the completion of the coding process, the data was analyzed using SPSS and MS Office Excel. The analysis of intercoder reliability resulted in an acceptable intercoder agreement rate 79% (see Appendix for details on agreement rates). Additionally, an independent samples t-test confirmed there are no statistically significant differences between coders' guideline scores.

## Discussion

#### Transformational, instructional, informational and relational aspects

To answer the first and research question “(1) Which transformational, instructional, informational and relational aspects can be found in the social media guidelines?” guideline scores are examined by quadrant. Overall, the results show higher scores for informative (22.41) and relational quadrants (22.47), rather than transformational (17.78) and instructional (18.62). Quadrant scores ranged from 14 to 27 for the informative, 15.2 to 28 for the relational, 8 to 26 for the transformational and 10.5 to 27 for the instructional quadrant (see Table 1).

This means that the majority of guidelines exhibit a strong “conventional structure” dimension within the CVF, as they typically provide clear and well structured information, and seem very credible (see Figure 1).

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Guideline	Transformational	Instructional	Informative	Relational	TOTAL SCORE
1	14,5	18	23,5	22	78
2	11	13,5	18,5	20	63
3	19,5	21	21	23	84,5
4	8	14	24,5	21	67,5
5	13,5	17	26	21,5	78
6	14	17	27	23	81
7	19,5	22	22,5	24,5	88,5
8	14	14,5	22,5	19,5	70,5
9	19	19,5	20	23	81,5
10	22	22,5	22,5	22,5	89,5
11	18	21	24	21,5	84,5
12	21	21,5	22	24,5	89
13	21	24	25,5	25	95,5
14	25	25,5	17,5	22	90
15	11,5	18,5	21,5	20,5	72
16	16,5	17,5	19	19,5	72,5
17	12	16	24	22	74
18	17	19,5	23	23	82,5
19	13,5	19,5	24	21,5	78,5
20	16	22,5	20	22	80,5
21	22	20,5	19	23,5	85
22	19	20	25	24	88
23	26	27	26	27	106
24	23	20	20	24	87
25	18	18,5	27	23	86,5
26	20,5	17	22	24	83,5
27	23	23,5	27	28	101,5
28	16	15	24	21	76
29	20	21	26	25,5	92,5
30	15,5	17	20	18,5	71

Guideline	Transformational	Instructional	Informative	Relational	TOTAL SCORE
31	16	16	23,5	21	76,5
32	15,5	16	22	21	74,5
33	17	17	23	23	80
34	13	16	15	17	61
35	16	20,5	26,5	25	88
36	13,5	14,5	15	18	61
37	21,5	21	21	20	83,5
38	22	22,5	24	25	93,5
39	24,5	24	25	25	98,5
40	14,5	12	17	15,5	59
41	14,5	13	23,5	25	76
42	21,5	22,5	24	22	90
43	15	13	19,5	20,5	68
44	16,5	16	25,5	22	80
45	18,5	10,5	16,5	21,5	67
46	17,5	12	14	21,5	65
47	20,5	17,5	25	25	88
48	17,5	15,5	26	24	83
49	21	22,5	24	25	92,5
50	23,5	25	26	26,5	101

<b>GRAND MEAN (overall)</b>	<b>17,78</b>	<b>18,62</b>	<b>22,41</b>	<b>22,47</b>
<b>GRAND MEAN (corporate)</b>	<b>17,38</b>	<b>19,62</b>	<b>22,62</b>	<b>22,52</b>
<b>GRAND MEAN (non-profit)</b>	<b>18,18</b>	<b>17,62</b>	<b>22,2</b>	<b>22,42</b>

With respect to the transformational quadrant, 17 out of 50 guidelines received a high score (20 or higher), while 4 out of 50 received a fairly low score (12 or less). Still, the majority of guidelines (29) ranged in the middle, which leads to the conclusion they cannot be qualified as particularly insightful, powerful, mind-stretching or visionary. Quite the contrary, the majority of the guidelines has been proved to be average in their transformational dimensions, with only two guidelines



that stand out in this quadrant with scores of 25 and 26. It is interesting to note here that these guidelines were developed by two corporations from the IT sector (Microsoft) and FMCG (P&G) that have often been considered as the pioneers when it comes to social media use.

Similarly, scores for the instructional quadrant are also grouped together, which is expected given the fact the two quadrants share a dimension of the CVF labeled „dynamic content“ (see Figure 1). 21 guidelines received a high score (20 or higher), with only 3 receiving a score of 12 or less for the instructional quadrant. Overall, the analyzed guidelines partially reflect the instructional dimension, which implies that their capacity to convey facts, detail and direction is average. Even though the guideline scores are generally higher for the instructional quadrant, the majority of the guidelines (26) still cannot be characterized as particularly interesting, stimulating, engaging, action oriented or practical. This finding reflects a lack of incentive, much needed in case an organization wishes to provide not only guidance, but also motivate the employees or volunteers to contribute in its social media platforms. For example, fewer guidelines contain a direct call to action or any sort of motivation for employees to actively participate in social media. Also, only a smaller number of guidelines contained a “best practices” section that could raise interest and provide practical examples of desired actions and behaviors. Still, three guidelines scored exceptionally high with scores of 25, 25.5 and 27.

As mentioned earlier, overall the guidelines’ scores were higher for the informative and relational quadrants that share the “conventional structure” dimension. In the informative quadrant, none of the guidelines received a score lower than 12, and only 3 had a score of 14 and 15, while 40 out of 50 guidelines received scores of 20 or higher. This means that the guidelines succeeded in conveying information and facts in a clear and well structured way that does not cause any doubt or confusion. Additionally, many guidelines received a fairly high score when it comes to being rigorous and precise, which is consistent with previous research of Fuduric & Mandelli (2013). This also signals an organizational concern for issues such as customer privacy, data protection, and an overall concern of organizations to follow legal and ethical frameworks (e.g. protect the privacy of employees, volunteers and customers/users; being clear and transparent, avoid harmful, hurtful or irrespective language etc.).

Finally, the relational quadrant scores were exceptionally high for the majority of the guidelines (44 out of 50 scored over 20; only 6 received scores between 15.5 and 19.5). This means that the guidelines communicated the content in an open, expressive and conventionally sound way that aims at building trust. This feature is important as it tends to establish a certain level of credibility and awareness of a topic at hand – in this case – social media. Additionally, the guidelines conveyed a high degree of awareness of the benefits and affordances social media bring to the organization, which closely relates to the research and findings of Vaast & Kaganer (2013).

In terms of competing values, a tension exists between the opposite “transformational” and the “informational” quadrant, as well as between the “instructional” and “relational” quadrant. As previously suggested in the literature (Quinn et.al. 1991; Stevens 1996) although these quadrants are considered opposites in terms of their main characteristics, this does not imply that a certain

dimension should be dominant. Quite the contrary – a well balanced and effective social media guideline should score high in most (if not all) quadrants. However, the research suggests that one dimension is often traded for another. More specifically, in this case, strong scores in the informational quadrant are often contrasted with relatively low scores in the transformational quadrant.

### **Profit vs. nonprofit social media guidelines**

To answer the second research question “Are there any significant differences between profit and non-profit social media guidelines, and how can these be explained?”; we first calculated grand means for each quadrant for profit and nonprofit guidelines (see bottom of Table 1). We can see that nonprofit guidelines grand mean scores are lower in every quadrant except the transformational. This would imply that nonprofits tend to develop guidelines that are characterized by transformational communication that is rich in empathy, inspiration and aims at stimulation change. This is in line with the literature as the core purpose of nonprofits, their mission and values all aim at stimulating a positive change in the society. However, if we consider that one of the main benefits of nonprofit participation in social media is the development of relationships with different groups of stakeholders (Waters et al., 2009); it is surprising that nonprofit guidelines on average score lower in the relational quadrant than corporate ones.

To gain more insight and conclude whether these differences are statistically significant, we conducted an independent samples t-test. The analysis showed there are no statistically significant differences between profit and nonprofit organizations’ scores for the transformational ( $t(-.704; df=48; NS)$ ), instructional ( $t(1.862; df=48; NS)$ ), informational ( $t(.438; df=48; NS)$ ) and relational ( $t(0.140; df=48; NS)$ ) quadrants.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this paper we analyzed corporate and nonprofit social media guidelines using the Competing Values Framework (CVF). The majority of the guidelines were rated as being average in each of the four respective quadrants of the framework (transformational, informational, instructional, and relational). It is important to note that in the context of social media, high scores in all of the quadrants should be considered crucial for the successful implementation of an organizations’ social media strategy. That is, the guidelines should equally stimulate change, provide detailed instruction, information and build trust.

Based on our analysis, we can conclude that organizations must not only define visionary social media policies and strategies, but also communicate them effectively to their employees/volunteers. This research offers several practical implications for managers and marketers that are developing and implementing social media strategies. First, it identifies the common characteristics of social media policies. Second, it stresses the importance of balancing out the

different dimensions of the guidelines, rather than accepting tradeoffs. Additionally, by providing a detailed examination of three guidelines the managers can gain additional insights into the guideline content, characteristics and can use the framework to identify gaps, point to opportunities for improvement or take the findings into account when developing new guidelines.

A possible limitation of the research could be the issue of interpretability of the features of the framework. The quality of the research, therefore, highly depends on the quality of the training raters receive prior to the coding process. An additional limitation of the research is that the sample was comprised of guidelines available online. The alternative approach would be to establish a direct contact with organizations in order to get a larger sample of guidelines to be analyzed, which requires more resources.

Finally, in terms of potential new research directions, this analysis can be broadened by identifying the internal and external factors that may influence the characteristics of the guidelines such as corporate culture or social media strategy. An additional possibility is to integrate this framework into more elaborate models (for example the stages in professionalization of social media participation).

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## Appendices

**Appendix A:** List of sampled policies and guidelines used in the research

Guideline	Company	Guideline title
1	Nordstrom	Social Networking Guidelines for Nordstrom Employees
2	CISCO	Internet Postings Policy
3	FORD	Digital Participation Guidelines
4	BAKER&DANIELS	Social Media Policy
5	BBC - personal use	Social Networking, Microblogs and other Third Party Websites: Personal Use
6	BBC - BBC use	Social Networking, Microblogs and other Third Party Websites: BBC Use
7	Daimler AG	Social Media Guidelines
8	DELL	Global Policy on Social Media
9	FEDex	Discussion Guidelines and Rules of Engagement
10	Flickr	Community guidelines
11	Forrester	Forrester Research's Social Media Policy
12	IBM	IBM Social Computing Guidelines
13	Intel	Social Media Guidelines
14	Microsoft	Channel 9 Doctrine
15	Microsoft	Social Media Policy – Tweeting guidelines
16	Ogilvy	PR Global Social Media Guidelines
17	Reuters	Reporting from the Internet and using social media
18	Coca Cola	Online Social Media Principles
19	Roche	Social Media Principles
20	Yahoo!	Personal Blog Guidelines
21	Apple	Apple Retail Blogging and Online Social Media Guidelines
22	Target	Social Media Policy
23	P&G	P&G Global Social Media Policy
24	Starbucks	Starbucks Social Media Guidelines for Canada and U.S. Partners
25	Xerox	Xerox social media guidelines
26	Young Life Australia	Young Life Australia Social Media Policy
27	YMCA of the USA	YMCA Guide to Social Media: An Introduction and Tips for Getting Started
28	United Way Toronto	Social Media Guidelines for United Way Toronto's Online Community
29	Unicef	Social Media in Emergencies: UNICEF Guidelines for Communication and Public Advocacy
30	TeachForAmerica	Social Media at Teach For America – Policy & Guidelines for Corp members

Guideline	Company	Guideline title
31	St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital	St.Jude Social Media Guidelines Corporate Partners
32	Special Olympics	SOWI Social Media Policy
33	United Nations	Social Media Guidelines
34	Darim Online	Social media staffing&policies
35	Smithsonian Institution	Social media policy
36	Salvation Army	Social media guidelines
37	Rotary International	Guidance on the use of social media
38	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies	Social media guidelines for IFRC staff
39	PBS	PBS Social Media Policy
40	Junior Achievement USA	Junior Achievement USA Social Media Policy for Employees and Volunteers
41	Goodwill Industries	Social Media Policy
42	Girl Scouts of America	Social Media Guidelines for Volunteers
43	Feeding America	Social Media Policy
44	Easter Seals	Social Media Policy
45	Children's hospital LA	Social Media Policy
46	Boys&Girls Club	Volunteer Guide
47	Boy Scouts of America	Boy Scouts of America Social Media Guidelines
48	Big Brothers Big Sisters	Online Social Media Policy for Volunteers
49	American Red Cross	American Red Cross Social Media Policy
50	American Cancer Society	Social Media Guidelines

**Appendix B: Coding instrument**

**Q1. Coder (1-2)**

**Q2. Guideline code (1-50)**

**Q3. Organization code (1-profit; 2-nonprofit)**

**Q4. For each guideline, indicate the degree to which the guideline reflects the following characteristics on a 1-7 point scale:**

Guideline characteristic	Completely disagree						Completely agree
Aware, discerning, sensitive, perceptive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly worded, empathic, forceful, powerful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Insightful, expansive, mind stretching, visionary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Innovative, creative, original, fresh	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Interesting, stimulating, engaging, absorbing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Conclusive, consequential, decisive, action-oriented	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Practical, informative, realistic, instructive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Focused, clear, logical, organized	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Rigorous, precise, disciplined, controlled	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Technically correct, conventionally sound	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Credible, believable, plausible, conceivable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Expressive, open, candid, honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7



## Appendix C: Intercoder agreement rates

Guideline	Guideline title
Aware, discerning, sensitive, perceptive	79%
Strongly worded, empathic, forceful, powerful	62%
Insightful, expansive, mind stretching, visionary	79%
Innovative, creative, original, fresh	72%
Interesting, stimulating, engaging, absorbing	89%
Conclusive, consequential, decisive, action-oriented	77%
Practical, informative, realistic, instructive	85%
Focused, clear, logical, organized	83%
Rigorous, precise, disciplined, controlled	85%
Technically correct, conventionally sound	83%
Credible, believable, plausible, conceivable	86%
Expressive, open, candid, honest	71%
<b>Average agreement rate</b>	<b>79%</b>

 6

## “We have parallel cultures now.” Age, internal competition and social media strategies of Swedish parliamentarians

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### ABSTRACT

This paper studies the way that members of parliament in the Swedish Riksdag use social media as a tool of intra-party competition. The analysed data consist of interviews with 37 MPs from the parliamentary parties in Sweden as well as content analysis of selected social media profiles. The results of the study suggest that age determines choice of strategy rather than sex, position, or party culture, and point in the direction of clash between communication norms. It contains one of the first studies of internal use of social media in parliamentary parties.

### 1. Introduction

Research on the political uses of social media/social network sites has concentrated either on activities outside of political parties (for example Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, on 'connective action') or on the role of social network sites in election campaigns (for example Nielsen, 2011, on 'mundane internet tools'). Studying the internal use of social network sites in political parties therefore fills an important gap in the literature. There has also been a lot of discussion on whether networked forms of organisation, made easier by social network sites and the internet, are replacing formal political organisations (cf. Benkler 2006; Zukin et al 2006), or bringing about a new set of hybridized organisations (Chadwick 2013, Bennett & Segerberg 2013).

A problem with research dealing with political parties and communication is that it often treats parties as monolithic units rather than as organisations made up of individuals in networks. Often, only communication at top central level is studied (i.e. party leadership/communications units)

whereas the everyday political communication of individual politicians, below the party leadership and outside of election campaigns, goes unnoticed.

This paper tries instead to study individual politicians as players entangled in an intricate game for power and influence, characterised by their individual disposition as well as their demographic and social background, and limited and affected by the formal and informal structures that society, the political system and their parties put on them. The perspective is explorative.

## 2. Individual strategies and party culture

In the tradition of Mancur Olson (1971), collective action cannot be explained by collective incentives (i.e. bringing about change together) since it would be more rational to let others do the job. Instead, selective interests of various kinds are introduced to explain political participation, i.e. benefits that are only available to only the person participating. These incentives need not be of a material kind (money); people participate for a wide range of reasons, including wanting to comply with societal norms, making their friends like them, enjoying expressing political views, etc. (Bäck et al. 2011: 77f; Verba et al. 1995:111f; Olson 1971: 60f). Depending on how you want to view politics, it can be seen as a cynical power game or as a deeply human activity played out by ordinary people who have emotions and want to be loved.

Of course, political participation can be a lot of things: it can range from sharing a link on Facebook, to joining a protest group, to being a prime minister or a president. This paper is about parliamentarians in the Swedish system, where the proportional election system creates a multi-party parliament where parties have more power than individual parliamentarians.

Parliamentarians have to be a lot of things: they have to do their actual work (making laws, control the government), but they also need to reach out to voters (to get re-elected), to their local party districts (to get re-nominated), and to their fellow parliamentarians and the party leadership (to get support for their political ideas and better positions in parliament, party or government). Reaching out to one of the groups might mean offending another group. Being too charismatic, or not enough charismatic might be seen as a threat to someone. Positioning against party leadership might win you friends in one place and enemies in another. In a system increasingly characterised by voting for individual candidates rather than parties it might be tempting to defeat others in your party by promoting your own policies, or doing PR stunts, or using vitriolic and/or humorous rhetoric to break through the noise.

In recent decades, or perhaps even centuries, this has to a large extent meant to appearing in mass media. Since most people get their political information through mass media, it is reasonable for politicians to appear frequently, not only to make voters tick the right box at the poll station, but also to remind the party district and party leadership of your existence (and your charisma, your rhetoric, your intimate knowledge of your issues, your general likeability etc).

Social network sites and other types of services generally lumped together under the fuzzy

concept of social media are sometimes said to change the nature of political communication and political organisation (some would say that organisation is nothing else than structured communication). If communication is made easier, so is organisation. People can mobilise outside of formal organisations, paving the way for networked individualism and making engagement in formal organisations less obvious as a way of channelling political interest (refs). The reporting of traditional mass media with important roles of a few influential editors morphs into a “hybrid media system” (Chadwick 2013) where different actors can influence the way that information is produced, packaged, interpreted and disseminated. Some of the changes affecting modern political parties have of course nothing to do with social media: trends of de-ideologization and post-material values makes people go elsewhere than to the parties to make their voices heard, and so political development must take place outside of parties rather than inside of them to be representative.

Political parties change as a result of changes on a larger societal scale. A hybrid media system creates hybrid political communication and hybrid strategies for politicians to devise and enact. But all parties are not alike. Group norms determine what behaviour is desirable under certain circumstances. The norms help to strengthen coordination and group identification. Barrling (2004) uses the term party culture. Party culture is essentially the social meaning that actions carry for the group. Studying party culture is studying the signs that this culture manifest and how party members see themselves as a group (ibid: 22). The party culture is the language with which a party defines itself. The norms of communication in a political party are the part of party culture that determines how members should behave when communicating internally and externally. Party cultures develop over time and can be quite robust. They are however not completely static. Political parties change as a result of changes in alliances among organisational actors and as a result of environmental pressure (Panebianco 1988: 240, 243). Among types of environmental changes that affect political parties we find, for example, changes to electoral legislation, new technology, changes to the media system, and so on. On a societal level, cultural shifts will also affect organisations. These changes affect both the formal and the informal structures (i. e. party culture) of a party.

For instance, the Social Democratic Party is seen as a party with a collectivist culture, whereas the Green Party is a very individualistic party. Hypothetically, the use of social network sites allows individuals to build their own political platforms and ‘brands’ outside of traditional hierarchies, which would then put greater strain on more collectivist parties than traditionally individualist parties.

In this paper, the potential effects of a new media system on the norms of communication in the parliamentary groups in the Swedish parliament will be studied.

### 3. Political Parties and Social Network Sites

Most research on how political parties use new media/social media has focused on the contact between politicians and voters, especially in relation to election campaigns. Increased complexity and fragmentation leads to decreasing marginal utility (Baringshorst 2009: 18). For this reason, the internet is used to lower costs and differentiate strategies.

Few studies on the internal use of new media have been found. Pedersen and Seglie (2005) study the use of e-mail, online discussion forums and web sites in Danish and Norwegian political parties. They set up three possible scenarios for how intra-party democracy could possibly be affected by the use of ICTs: 'member empowerment', 'elite empowerment', and 'politics as usual'. Using data from surveys, they find that members with formal positions in the party use the internet more than grass roots members, which is taken as support for the elite empowerment scenario. Davis (2010) interviews a hundred British parliamentarians, journalists and civil servants and come to the conclusion that using the internet brings about a widening of elite democracy. For party members and others interested in politics, discussing, influencing the political system and obtaining information is made easier, but 'ordinary people' are not affected. Davis claims that politicians and journalists tend to form closed elite discourse networks, and this trend is reinforced by the use of digital media (ibid: 754).

However, a gap in the literature is the way norms of communication in political parties change as a result of the adoption of new media. And while there is no reason to believe that the adoption of new communication technology will affect all groups and individuals in the same way, social network sites do not come without some cultural baggage. This cultural baggage includes a set of ideas of the nature of human organisation.

Ideologically connected to Web 2.0 and social media is the idea that the era of hierarchical organisations is over and that organising is best done through loose and more or less horizontal networks, tapping the 'collective intelligence' of the crowd and allowing each individual to act autonomously but in concordance with others (cf Lévy 1997; Shirky 2008; Rheingold 2002). These ideas are in turn connected to theories of post-materialist values and accelerating individualism (Inglehart 1977; Bjereld and Demker 2006).

In participation research, some scholars maintain that this leads to the supplement of traditional forms of political participation (in political parties, interest organisations and social movements) with a strictly network based form of organisation (Bennett and Segerberg 2013). Applied on the study of political parties, it has been argued that "[s]trikingly, political parties using the Internet seem to discover some of the movement- like qualities and characteristics they have often lost since they have transformed themselves from the social movements they, to a certain extent, once were into the tightly organized, centralized and professional organizations they – most of the time – have become" (van de Donk et al 2004: 5).

We should not expect social network sites to fundamentally alter the norms of communication of political parties. We should, however, expect different social network site strategies from

parliamentarians depending on, for instance, formal position in the hierarchies, age, and so on. Parliamentarians in low positions could be more interested in the opportunities of building bases of support in the internal and electoral arenas to challenge existing structures and further their own careers. Parliamentarians in high positions could have less interest in exploiting the opportunities of building bases of support. Likewise, it could be the case that differing strategies could be the result of generational attitudes. Differing strategies within the parliamentary group lead to confusion over what the norms of communication really are.

### 4. Methods and data

For this study, 37 members of parliament (henceforth MPs), belonging to the Swedish Social Democratic Party (11), the Moderate Party (10), the Green Party (5), the Liberal Party (4), the Left Party (3), the Centre Party (3), and the Sweden Democrats (1), were interviewed about their social media habits, how using social media had affected their work as parliamentarians and how social media had changed the dynamics of the parliamentary group (henceforth party group).<sup>1</sup>

A random sample was not possible. Instead, respondents were chosen to produce a sample that included variation in age, rank and party. "Rank" is operationalized thusly: being a chairperson or vice chairperson of a parliamentary committee (utskott), as well as being a group leader, gives you high rank.

The interviews were carried out from June 2012 to January 2014. The respondents chose where they wanted to be interviewed; in most cases this was the cafeteria of the Swedish Riksdag, in a few other cases the interviews took place in another place in the Riksdag buildings, in a café in the MP's constituency, or at the home of the MP. Two interviews were carried out on the telephone. The interviews ranged in time from 25 minutes up to 80 minutes.

1

In Swedish, Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Arbetareparti, Moderata Samlingspartiet, Miljöpartiet de Gröna, Folkpartiet Liberalerna, Vänsterpartiet, Centerpartiet and Sverigedemokraterna, respectively.

The respondents have been interviewed under the condition of anonymity. Being anonymous makes protects respondents from retaliation from their peers, which allows them to speak more freely. This is especially important when the subject touches on-going power struggles in the group and criticism of others' behaviour. However, the same protection might also encourage respondents to not being entirely truthful (cf. Teorell

1998: 43f). Anonymity was preferred in this case, since it made respondents feel more comfortable. At several times, respondents reassured during the interviews that it was anonymous, and at times lowered their voices and moved their heads closer to me when saying things they felt were especially sensitive.

The transcribed interviews were systematised and compared with the actual Facebook and Twitter feeds of the parliamentarians. In the next section, the results of the interviews will be summarised under three themes: changing attitudes to the opportunities of social network site use for career purposes; colliding norms of behaviour within the parliamentary group; and uncertainty resulting in a conflict of attitudes with behaviour.

## 5. Social network sites and tensions in norms of communication: age, rank and party cultures

In the general population, young people are heavily overrepresented in social network site (SNS<sup>2</sup>) use and intensity of use. When it comes to using SNS for political purposes, young people are even more overrepresented (Gustafsson & Höglund 2011). This might lead one to believe that younger MPs would be much more interested in using SNS. This is not the case; about 92 percent of all Swedish parliamentarians use either Facebook or Twitter<sup>3</sup>. The few nonusers are found in all parties.

Of the sample, all respondents except one have Facebook accounts. The number of friends varies a lot, from several hundred to several thousand. All Facebook users update regularly, usually a couple of times a day. Most respondents have a Twitter account as well, with number of followers ranging from several hundred to several thousand. How much they tweet ranges from one tweet now and again with a few days of inactivity in between to around 10-12 tweets a day, including retweets and discussions.

It was obvious that SNS were not seen as a favoured channel for internal communication in the party group, this due to the semi-public nature. Instead, text messages were by far the preferred method of communication, and SNS are predominantly used as a means for reaching out to voters, journalists and fellow party members. E-mail is not seen as a viable means of communication as MPs generally receive too much e-mail to be able to respond in a timely manner. SNS are a fast news source and often the way that MPs hear about news first. It is also a way of keeping track

of fellow MPs and other party members; what they are doing and what positions they take on political issues. In addition, MPs can use SNS as a channel to get their message out to voters, fellow party members and journalists, as well as inform the public and the media about what they are doing at the moment. This offers a way for MPs to show the public what they spend their time on and that they are actively working for the electorate. As one respondent puts it, MPs who are less active on SNS run the risk of being suspected for wasting their time on the taxpayers' expense. SNS also provide MPs with a source of positive feedback of their performance. It is however also the case that the management and strategy differs a lot on an individual basis: while Twitter is generally used as a tool to talk politics, Facebook can be a place to interact solely with political contacts (voters, party members) or with a mix of political and private contacts. Since Swedish parliamentarians usually do their updates themselves, strategies depend heavily on individual behaviour and path-dependency: if you started your Facebook profile as a site of interacting with (real) friends and family, most likely you will keep doing this.

It would perhaps be reasonable to believe that most differences in norms of communication and attitudes towards using SNS among the parliamentarians would be attributable to their age: after all, young people tend to use SNS more intensively than their elders, and there is evidence that young people tend to use SNS in a different way than their elders (Gustafsson & Höglund 2011). If we only look to attitudes to social media as a career tool, there is no such connection. The tendency is instead that respondents with high positions within the party or the group believed less in the merits of avid SNS use for internal success, whereas others tended to view SNS in a more favourable light, regardless of their age. However, if we instead turn to the personal-impersonal or personal-private axis, age seems to matter more.

The respondents deem their own SNS conduct to be desirable and in accordance with norms of communication. They should be "personal, but not private". In order to be entertaining for followers and friends, SNS profiles should not be restricted to dry policy proposals and information about what meeting the MP is going to next. In SNS you are supposed to be human, and so respondents occasionally post more personal things. What is personal and what is private is however a matter of definition. Elaborating on where that limit is, one respondent explained that s/he viewed her presence in SNS as being on a par with a profile interview in a tabloid. Others specified that posting pictures of their children would be off limits.

When discussing the behaviour of others in SNS, respondents paint a picture of extremes along three dimensions: intensity, intimacy and frankness (or activeness, personality and individualism). Too much of any of these elements is seen as undesirable, but there does not seem to be any agreement on what is enough. As one respondent puts it, "You can almost feel that some people are really screaming for affirmation!" The same respondent complains that Twitter has become "a platform for mutual admiration; it's a gang of people who are talking to each other all the time and try to outdo each other with who's got the funniest comment" and for some of his/her colleagues,



“it’s a strategy to keep in with journalists and like have this jargon that we’re buddies.”

It is clear that some individuals in the party group are seen as being more outspoken than others. Some respondents explain this with generational differences: people born in the 1980s are more outspoken. Others refer to differences in position: having a high formal position prevents you from being to frank. Yet others point to personality: some people are basically more extrovert than others. Interesting enough, there is no pattern in the answers between categories of respondents; respondents with high positions did not necessarily point to the rank factor. It seems however evident that older parliamentarians (born before 1970) seem to see younger parliamentarians (especially those born in the late 1970s and the 1980s) as a distinct group in terms of SNS use, whereas this is less clear the other way around. Some young parliamentarians acknowledge this; others do not. One respondent claimed that instead of making internal debates more transparent, SNS have contributed to an even more secretive climate:

If you post things like that in social media, then the group leadership know that. “What the devil, you’re sitting here snitching about things you shouldn’t talk about, you’ve signed the party group rules!” So that you don’t want to do, but a phone call is impossible to track. It’s a difficult balance. On the one hand you want to be open. On the other hand private conversations must remain private, or else people won’t dare to speak freely, and that becomes more and more difficult with Twitter and Facebook and SMS. It’s almost the case that even when you’re talking between four eyes, you’re more careful.

There is no consensus over whether SNS have brought about an increased tension between individualism and collectivism but generally the tension is more felt in among Social Democrats on Left Partists (which is in line with expectations, since these parties have more collectivist party cultures). But also members of the Moderate party group claim this. Among those who say that individualism has become stronger in the party group, the role of SNS is disputed. One respondent refers to SNS as a cause of growing individualism. Others point to a general trend in society: building your personal brand becomes more important in all branches. Many respondents claim that young MPs are more individualist. In spite of the fact that all parliamentary groups keep some form of guidelines on SNS behaviour very few of the respondents were aware of any such policy. Informal norms of communication in the different parties are instead felt instinctively (perhaps with the result that the lack of consensus in the party groups is obscured).

But it is obvious that some parties are having more troubles with differing norms than others. One Social Democratic respondent goes so far as to claim that there are “parallel cultures right now. One where everything is open and transparent. And one where you still live in a world where we can fight secretly and then present something. But the citizens aren’t buying it.” The theme of parallel cultures might also be applied to “internal transparency”: one respondent (also a Social Democrat) told a story of how s/he went to a meeting where s/he was going to be fired from a position. When the chair of the meeting explained that s/he and the respondent had agreed that s/he should step down, the respondent protested,

saying that s/he had indeed been fired. “And then people get angry with ME. Not because the chairman is lying, they get angry because I called the lie.”

## 6. Conclusions

The party culture and the norms of communication in the parliamentary groups of the Social Democrats and the Left Party have been characterised as collectivist and focused on loyalty, whereas the parliamentary groups of especially the Liberal and Green Parties have been characterised as individualist, with other parties in the middle of the scale (Barrling 2004). However, the interviews presented in this study shows that norms might be under external pressure and that there might be a tension between competing norms of communication. Since it seems to be younger parliamentarians across all parties rather than parliamentarians in only some parties that embody this change in norms, and that the norms are more in the individualist-personal-active line this affects parties with collectivist norms more than parties with individualist norms. Tensions in relation to proper use of SNS seem to emanate from different opportunity structures depending on rank, the influence of different attitudes to SNS and transparency, and a general confusion and insecurity in the party groups over what exactly are the norms of communication in the wake of environmental changes and new technology.

It is not surprising that MPs in high positions say that SNS are not an important factor for internal career building, since they already have attained a secure position, they do not have to use an active SNS strategy to make their way within the party. For MPs with a low position, SNS are seen as one useful strategy among many: they have more to win from using SNS, and since they are not official spokespersons, they are at liberty to use SNS in a more expressive way.

In this unsecure environment, players with low positions and high ambitions are those that have the most to win to exploit potential changes in possible strategies. Players with high positions have more to lose: if they play their cards wrong, they might lose the positions they have attained. But the uncertainty is in reality so high that there does not seem to be any connection between position and attitudes on one hand, and behaviour on the other hand.

In the process that has been called the mediatization of politics (Strömbäck 2008), one important aspect has been a perceived personalisation of politics. Not only the political views and actions of politicians are interesting for the news media; entire elections are reduced to a fight between specific individuals, and reporting, especially on female politicians regularly include personal and/or private angles (Wendt 2011). As politicians adapt to the media logic, they too become interested in managing their personal image. SNS allow politicians to present a tailored personal image of themselves to voters, fellow party members and journalists. Since SNS almost inherently presuppose content of a personal nature, they lend themselves naturally to identity management (boyd 2008: 129f; Gustafsson 2010: 15). Users have to strike a balance between disclosure and privacy. In earlier research, it has however been shown that there is “little to no relationship



between online privacy concerns and information disclosure on online social network sites” (Tufekci 2008: 20). The user interface in social network sites seem to make people more prone to voluntarily disclose information of a private or semi-private nature regardless of stated attitudes towards this. The respondents in this study were aware that they had to “ease up” their SNS presence with a personal note, but this did not seem to be felt as a burden.

Norms of good identity management and being personal in SNS differ considerably between individuals. If there really are competing norms of communication in the party group, this could potentially become an even greater problem in the future, as insecurity and conflicts grow over the proper norms regarding continuums of secrecy-transparency; privacy-publicity; loyalty-individualism. The lack of consensus on what really is the informal (or even formal) norm for MPs’ appearance in SNS creates insecurity and confusion for individual players in a collectivist and hierarchical institutional frame.

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## Application of the Use of ICTs on Research Methods to Ensure Sustainability of Programs

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### ABSTRACT

With the rapid growth of information and communication technologies (ICTs), a fusion of digital and real world communication practices has been created and directly influences our lives. The incorporation of ICTs has shifted the how, who and why certain groups of individuals are contacted to respond to certain questionnaires. Using Gunilla Bradley's Convergence Theory and Model as its foundation, this exploratory study examined the use of online surveys to collect data in the state of Tennessee. The authors posit that the incorporation of ICTs may be useful in program sustainability once external funding is no longer available. It provides researchers with new and better ways to collect and organize data and interact with respondents.

**Key words:** information communication technologies (ICTs), social media, research assistance, online measurement, data collection

Author Notes: We want to thank the Tennessee Department of Education for allowing us to use the information provided in the five evaluation reports (2007-2011) from their Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP).

## Application of the Use of ICTs on Research Methods to Ensure Sustainability of Programs

With the rapid growth of information and communication technologies (ICTs), people are more connected than ever, allowing for greater access and engagement through the fusion of digital and real world communication practices. Bradley (2006) suggests that the integration of ICTs by society not only allows for better ways to communication but to organize society as a whole. It is this new integration of ICTs by society that has shifted our use from “wired” (telephones and desktop computers) to wireless. Pew Research Center’s Internet Project (2014) found that 61 percent of Americans identified the internet as essential for work or other reasons. Nielsen’s 2014 report examining digital consumers provides an understanding of who, where, and how consumers connect. Identifying that consumers are “connected” to the Internet or social media at least 60 hours per week (1). Thus, supporting a 2012 Pew report stated that 46 percent of American adults owned smartphones. Thus, allowing for better access to new media platforms across age cohorts and generations through testing, microblogging, social networking (Facebook), and creating snackable visuals (Instagram) by both public and private organization to communicate and connect with and using targeted sales towards current and future customers.

This growth in constant connection and interaction, when exploring these new social media practices, is viewed positively for engaging communities, stakeholders, and even internally within organizations. Government agencies have taken to new media to provide accurate, timely information regarding public safety (Page, Freberg, & Saling, 2013; Helbig & Hrdinova, 2011; Sutton, 2010) and public diplomacy (U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/> 2014; Brookings Institution, 2010). These efforts of implementing various communication strategies must be done to counteract public fear, uncertainty, and dispel rumors and false information.

However, it must be mentioned that while corresponding with individual stakeholders using branded or topical hashtags, sharing updates and breaking news, as well as educating audiences with information can be seen in a positive light; some stakeholders do not always see it this way. While social media can aid with the rapid dissemination of information the quality and accuracy of that information at times can be questions. Freberg, Saling and Page (2014) identified that the use of proactive and sustainable social media practices can be help and hinder an organization’s reputation. They offered that the information provided by the organization, agency, or individual themselves and even the media can be false or misleading at times. While this research focused on reputation dissonance and social media, the concept is multidisciplinary suggesting that social media can cause a lack of trust by stakeholders not only of the organizations, individuals, and government agencies but news agencies who may be communicating the information. In essence, social media is considered to be a hub communication medium for various industries, organizations, and professions to use to channel their communication messages, knowledge, and narrative to their intended audiences.

While research on the use of social media to assist in communication efforts is highly documented

by both practitioners Newman, 2014, Davis 2011) and academics (Chou, Hunt, Beckjord . . . Hesse 2009 Eyrich, Padman & Sweetser 2008), the question becomes can ICTs and, by extension, social media assist researchers in data collection. This area of communication, especially when considering research conducted at all levels (local, state, regional, national and globally) offers a way for direct interaction with respondents in a timely, money saving ways. Considering the positive and negative impacts of using the Internet and social media, program administrators, educators and researchers must strive to ensure that when they communicate with their stakeholders that communication is trustworthy, transparent, and timely.

Taking into account the challenges and opportunities using this form of research, this paper examined the incorporation of ICTs with the traditional research method of printed surveys. The authors identified potential challenges, weaknesses and opportunities when dealing with the use of ICTs as they relate to survey and/or interview programs for data collection. Specifically, they examined the incorporation of web-based survey administration in an educational grant program in the state of Tennessee.

## Literature Review

### Information and Communication Technology (ICTs)

With the rise in information and communication technologies (ICTs) and people’s use in their daily, work and private lives, “ICTs have the potential to accelerate, enrich and deepen skills, to motivate and engage students” (Noor-Ul-Amin, 2013, 1). Thus, confirming Bradley’s (2006) work towards the use of ICTs to improve the quality of life by providing freer communication interaction. This encourages access and utilization offered by ICTs while meeting the needs of humans by making it easier to perform work and private activities over long distances.

Practices and strategies implemented by practitioners, scholars have explored the impact and theoretical evolution of how technology advances and platforms on behavior and perception of credibility for each age cohort. Fuchs (2009) examined the use of information and communication technologies and introduced the concept of Critical Internet Theory to analyze the use of the Internet by humans. Fuchs (2009) analyzed the relationship of the Internet and society and how the Internet shapes and is shaped by society, suggesting that there is no clear understanding of the use social media or “new media” on society. Going on to state that, he stated, “the antagonism between cooperation and competition that shapes modern society, limits self-determination and participation, also shapes the technosocial Internet system,” (Fuchs, 2009, 76). Use of this new media, according to Fuchs, allows for a more global society in which knowledge is not owned by any one individual; but society as a whole.

Much like Fuchs, Hofkirchner (2011) suggested that the integration, assessment and design of ICTs helps to shape society and in turn society helps to shape and advance ICTs. Through his concept of Global Sustainable Information Society (GSIS), Hofkirchner (2011) posits, “ICTs provide

the means for enhancing the collective intelligence of the information society on different scales” (p. 2). Further, that sustainability of these can be achieved through culture, political freedom, and economic preservation through and technological compatibility. Hofkirchner based his work off of Bradley’s (2006) work on the good ICT society in which she identifies that ICTs shape society and society helps to shape and develop ICTs. That through society’s use of ICTs they help to safeguard human wellbeing overall either directly or indirectly.

Bradley (2011) examined the role and impact of an individual’s use of ICTs at work and at home. Further, she identified early in her research that “Reality is not constant, values vary and the academic balance is not always well calibrated” (Bradley, 2011, p. 2). Because the use of ICTs is done globally, her research in its use especially on the interplay between society, organizations, communities, and at the individual level helps those in the academic arena to focus on the social change and impact especially research. The development and implementation of her Convergence Model on ICT (see Appendix A for model) provides a visual representation of how society has integrated technology in their daily lives and the changes that occur.

Bradley’s research has provided a foundation for additional research in the use of computer technology in multitasking (Robbin, 2011), the use of computers and its impact on psychology, work environment and stress (Robertson, 2011), as well as the integration of information and communication technologies in community planning (McIver, 2011).

Understanding that ICTs impact and are impacted by society as a whole foods us to exam the broader range of information in regards to the Internet and the programs developed is research that aid in communication and most recently assist in data collection and analysis. Therefore, Bradley’s (2011) convergence theory provides an important bridge in understanding the use of new media on our daily lives, which provides insight into the how’s and why’s humans use ICTs to develop not only themselves both personally and professionally, but with that knowledge impact society as a whole.

With this in mind, the authors questioned whether or not global use of ICTs can be used at the academic research or research over all to aid in furthering understanding of and sustainability for programs, more importantly, how to engage all stakeholders. Robertson (2011) suggested that an individual can influence their understanding and quality of life through education and training in computerization. Further, that the strategy that is adopted can assist in preventing and counteracting the stresses that may develop which can impact and fulfill the human needs, which “contribute to both a physically and psychologically healthy environment” (p. 115).

It is this area that Freberg (2012) questioned and explored the impact of the level of trustworthiness and credibility assigned to different age cohorts when receiving a message from a social media platform compared to other forms of media. As technology advances, the level of trustworthiness and assigned credibility evolves. This factors into how social media has increased empowerment of the individual stakeholder and how it allows them greater control, influence, and connection to others while breaking down the barriers in time and location, and increase the willingness to help others virtually.

### **Overview of Information Sharing on Web 2.0**

The rapid evolution of the web, particularly Web 2.0, has transformed how people and organizations engage in conversations as well as sharing information with each other (Pentina & Tarafdar, 2014). These online communities that are usually housed on discussion forums, social networking sites, blogs, and even photo sharing websites, are about connecting individuals with similar interests to share knowledge with each other (Park et al., 2014). However, one of the missing components within building these communities and sparking dialogue is the measurement of what these conversations mean for the organization or parties involved.

According to Osatuyi (2013), information is considered in the realm of communication technologies to be dynamic when it creates and sustains multiple conversations virtually. The purpose of information shared virtually on these communication platforms is to spark interest and discussions about a particular subject or issue within the community, or about creating a platform to share knowledge with others to create momentum for people to contribute their individual perspectives to the group (Osatuyi, 2013). One thing missing in this point of information is the analysis and research component to determine what is relevant and salient for the organization involved to help their message strategies, campaign initiatives, and community engagement with their audiences to transcend from virtual conversations to offline behavior. Sharing information with others serves as a clear benefit for establishing positive and sustainable communities online (Bock, Zmud, Kim & Lee, 2005).

Another benefit for organizations using communication technologies is to establish the form of relationship management function virtually. Relationship management, pertaining to the focus on personalizing individual conversations and having two-way communications with both parties, has been well researched and explored in this area within public relations

### **Evolution of Social Media**

One of the more prominent revolutions and now established mediums of Web 2.0 of course is social media. Scholars have assigned numerous definitions and conceptualizations to social media, but Ellison and Boyd (in press) discussed their updated definition to be focused on being:

A networked communication platform in which participations 1) uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or systems-level data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 2) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site (p. 158).

As Ellison and Boyd (in press) mentioned in their definition of social media, the use and focus of authenticity embedded into social media platforms is key to establish a community based on collective knowledge, dialogue, and storytelling. These conversations and user-generated information provides an eyewitness account into the mindset of their audiences at a particular



point in time. In addition, the vast amount of longitudinal data available to be collected for or by the organization to analyze and apply with their particular messages strategies to be better effective with their audiences is immense. With these components, this allows organizations to have a wealth of knowledge and insights to choose from when it comes to analyzing the findings for research purposes.

There are several differences when it comes to traditional Web 2.0 technologies along with traditional forms of communications and media compared to social media. Where traditional media feature a primarily one-way dissemination of content, social media provide means for real two-way or group conversations. The cost of entry to traditional media is quite high, but social media users create content at very little if any expense. However, with the recent changes of organic reach and presence on Facebook, many may argue that social media and other forms of communication technologies will cost organizations to “pay to play” to get their information out as well as analyze these results for their research purposes.

In place of traditional media’s designated spokespersons, multiple voices from all walks of life produce user-generated content in social media. To a much greater extent than traditional media, social media create and maintain networks of personal relationships. Information from traditional media is frequently delayed, but social media are immediate, breaking barriers of time and location. Each social media site focuses on one or several of seven major functions: identity, conversation, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

### Information Sharing and Web-based Survey Research

With 88 percent of American adults owning a cellphone regardless of their gender or their socioeconomic or education levels; and with 46 percent of those owning some form of smartphone (Smith, 2012); people are more connected than ever. More and more organizations are turning more towards social media; transforming the physical team to virtual/social communicators to be able to coordinate and enable knowledge within and outside of the organization (Ellison, Gibbs, & Weber, in press). Overall, social media has been used to connect groups of people using mobile Internet capabilities and social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Pinterest to name a few. All of these platforms make engaging conversations and building professional and personal networks through real-time information and breaking down the barriers of time and location. In order to develop these types of communication strategies organizations and agencies must interact with their stakeholders. Finding out what type of content they [stakeholders] believe is relevant to them. This question and answer ensures agencies are listening to their customers through focused web-based surveys.

Evans and Mathur (2005) presented not only strengths and weaknesses of web-based surveys but they compared how these surveys were distributed: mail, in-person, email, etc. They identified that use of online surveys allowed researchers a global reach, were convenient not only for distribution but also data analysis, and had a low administration cost. The use of online or smartphone surveys

for data collection provides positive results, and are comparable to print leading to less missing responses and having more flexible coding allowing for easier analysis (Boyer, Olson, Calantone and Jackson 2002; Evans & Mathur, 2005). Research also suggests that response rates for online surveys are higher than print surveys (Sax, Gilmartin, Lee, & Hagedorn, 2003).

Weakness found with online survey administration were that email may see it as “junk” or spam and the individual might never see it, technology may be lacking for those receiving, people may see online survey administration as an invasion of privacy and that respondent may lack computer experience (Evans & Mathur, 2005). In their comparison of print versus online survey administration, McCoy, Marks, Carr and Mbarika (2005) found that there were significant differences in the way surveys were administered. They posited that this difference may lead to lower response rates for those completing the survey online versus on paper. This corresponds with Xing and Handy (2011) and Bowling’s (2005) findings on the mode of administration and its impact on data quality. The research examined the use of interviews, surveys (print and on line) or telephone key pad responses. In her research, Bowling found that the mode of administration influenced responses.

In a 2010 report by the European Union (EU) considering the use of social networks that have developed through human contributions on the web for research, The EU was considering the use of mobile social networks to provide broader communication and research efforts. The report recognized the challenge that fragmentation of the population, pervasive content and devices that distract instead of help and adversarial interactions and opinions. .

Unlike, the research conducted by the EU where formal authorization must be given, Buchanan’s (2013) research on the use of social media in research and its challenges and strategies, offered possible ways to conduct and participate in research suggesting the use of online surveys, Skype (to assist in interviews – individual and/or group), using data analytics provided by such sites as Twitter and other Internet sites and social media networks.

Considerations and challenges Buchanan offered when using electronic forms of data collection include inaccessibility due to power outages, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of participants, confirmation of age verification and documentation of informed consent. In addition, for those researchers who do not have identified participants, Buchanan suggested that researchers must have a plan for recruitment. This plan must include but is not limited to how and through which portals the researchers recruit participants, how participants’ will be maintained these must meet the standards of the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

After reviewing the literature and exploring the potential use and incorporation to use ICTS to enable sustainability, the following research questions emerged:

RQ1: Why did the project evaluators’ transition survey administration from printed to web-based format for students and not all participants?

RQ2: Was the transition cost effective to the data collection process overall?

RQ3: Would project evaluators use online survey administration instead of print for data collection needs for future evaluations?



### Methodology

The authors explored the usefulness of ICTs in data collection efforts of externally funded programs; recognizing the possibility for program sustainability once funding was no longer available. To conduct this research the authors used a cumulative case study. Information reviewed included five project reports: four formative and the summative evaluation report (IAE 2007a, IAE 2008b, IAE 2009c, IAE 2010d, & IAE 2011e), documents and artifacts held by the evaluation group, as well as interviews with evaluation staff.

The data was then analyzed to see if there was a shift in the number of survey responses. The reports were also used to see if the evaluators recognized the use of ICTs by the project administrators, school system administration, teachers, students and parents. Identifying whether this form of communication use of online surveys compared to printed surveys allowed for savings to the evaluators who were then able to turn transfer those savings on to program administrators. Project evaluation reports from a six-year study conducted for the state of Tennessee's grant provided by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) entitled Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). GEAR UP is an education initiative designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in college (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.html>).

The state of Tennessee was one of the states accepted for participation in this program in 2005. Within the state, nine counties located in rural, economically challenged area with low graduation rates. They were chosen to receive funding were selected based on their ranking in the bottom 10 schools and who needed assistance to increase student graduation rate and ultimately go on to attain a college degree.

The funding and distribution of funds was done on two levels. At the state level, overarching funding was used to aid in administration of and data collection for information to be used throughout the state. In addition, the state developed a web portal, "CollegeforTN" to provide web-based access to information regarding postsecondary option in Tennessee. This web portal was not limited to those schools participating in the GEAR UP program.

At the county and ultimately school levels, grants were given to assist in student and teacher development. It is at the school level of five of the nine schools that the authors were allowed access to evaluation reports for the six-years this program was conducted. The project grant for the state of Tennessee was beginning in 2005 and ending in 2011. Program participation included approximately 2,000 students during each project year.

### Findings

RQ1: Why did the project evaluators' transition survey administration from printed to web-based format for students and not all participants?

The findings indicated that the shift in pen and paper surveys to online came at the request of project staff members. While only five of the nine systems made this transition, the option was available to all the systems. According to interview results, project evaluators stated that

project staff asked for the transition in order to allow for increased flexibility of delivery and ease of access for survey administration. These findings match those identified in by Noor-Ul-Amin's (2013) research suggesting that ICTs allow for greater flexibility of delivery not only of information but also of geographical access to remove many of the constraints that printed surveys have on administration.

Using the reports for data analysis, the authors looked at whether there was an impact in this shift from pen and paper to that of online survey completion by students in five out of the nine counties involved in this grant project. The shift in student survey participation occurred in the last two years of this project. As reported in the five annual reports provided, approximately 11,000 total students responded to surveys distributed throughout the project. This number included the initial baseline survey (see Appendix B for survey distribution).

Based on the information provided by the reports the authors identified a slight, positive shift in how participants initially responded to evaluation instruments. Merging the use of ICTs with traditional communication and response processes allowed participants more time to complete survey instruments. The results (see Appendix C for results) suggests that had this project continued, students completing surveys online would have continued to provide increased participation. However, the quality of that participation cannot be ascertained.

Two challenges were identified for the online administration. First, due to inclement weather (whether printed or online) schools were closed causing a delay in survey administration and data collection this included power outages during the data collection period (November through January). Second, many of the systems were not equipped technologically to participate in online survey administration. Reports suggested that those districts who participated in the online administration had used part of the grant funds they received to update their technology capabilities and purchased laptops and other technology.

Two weaknesses were found in the online survey administration. First, students participating in online surveys were given individual access codes to log on to the survey site. Unlike, those participating in printed surveys that provided their own identifier. Second, students participating in both survey methods had to be supervised, thus, taking time away from teachers who could have been doing lesson preparation.

Opportunities for survey administration, as identified previously in Nielsen's 2014 report, suggests that the use of smartphone apps, considering that two-thirds (64%) of respondents identified using social media sites at least once a day. The use of apps could be used to better communicate with all participants (parents, teachers, and students), to include reminders of scheduled interventions. This would allow for better count of intervention participation and could track number of events attended. This could also allow for immediate response to whether that event was successful. These opportunities would provide a better understanding of respondent's perception of the event rather than waiting until the end of the year where they have to recall if they participated and what they were thinking and feeling at the time of each event.

RQ2: Was the transition cost effective to the data collection process overall?

With regard to the cost effectiveness of this form of data collection, project evaluators did not track cost savings through contract budgets and billing. However, there was a savings in the time it took the data analyst to analyze online surveys compared to the analysis of printed. This time savings allowed for the analyst to focus on other areas of the project (assist in conducting student interviews as well as prepare various sections of the report(s), etc.).

RQ3: Would project evaluators use online survey administration instead of print for data collection needs for future evaluations?

Finally, in considering the use of web-based survey administration instead of pen and paper for data collection needs for future evaluations, the project evaluators offered the following consideration:

There are many misunderstanding about public schools. . . .the fact of the matter is that many school systems in Tennessee, especially rural school systems in lower income communities, lack solid reliable information systems (personal communication, May 22, 2014).

The evaluator, went on to suggest that under the new standards developed via the Common Core Initiative may allow school systems in the state to someday have the technology base to allow for web-based surveys.

### Implications and Future Research

This paper explored the incorporation of ICTs and web-based platforms to assist with data collection in a longitudinal study of high school students in five Tennessee counties. From our initial observation we conclude that the use of online survey administration provides a more flexible and accurate data collection method. As identified in the beginning, Americans are using various forms of ICTs in which to communicate. Nielsen (2014) further identified that social media use, particularly by individuals using smartphones, suggesting that the use of ICTs provides a more comprehensive message strategy. Understanding the best communication strategy and, more importantly, what the consumer believes is relevant allows project administrators and evaluators to set priorities what will be most beneficial.

The incorporation of social media along with traditional communication practices, not only benefits project participants – for receiving information and being able to communicate directly and immediately with project staff but also provide instant feedback to evaluators at each event. It also allows project administrators to keep in touch with and plan ahead for future events based on the feedback of project participants. As well as evaluators – who are able to collect participant perceptions at each event by using web-based platforms or native applications.

While research has been conducted on social media, on printed versus online survey administration, and the take away from the impact on grant funding, the authors could not find research on the use of and impact on online survey administration of surveys and its cost effectiveness. Nor could they find research on whether the use of ICTs are useful in project sustainability once external funds are no longer available. Therefore, the authors can only conclude that the integration of ICTs with other communication platforms allows for better sharing of knowledge, discussion, and allows for better insight into the role social media itself plays in our society.

Finally, the authors conclude that the integration of ICTs from the very beginning of a project allows all participants (parents, students, teachers, administration staff, etc.) instant access to information as well as allows them a better way to communicate instantly. Use of social media tools would provide for analysis of change in cost over the length of the project identifying any savings or increases that can then be passed on the project/grant administrators. This examination could include such areas as participant and stakeholder communication efforts including feedback by both, data collection efforts, and change in both efforts based on evaluation outcomes. Consideration of use of ICTs and the impact of continuing education efforts for both public and private organizations examining the sustainability of training provided.

### Conclusion

The incorporation of ICTs in research is not only cost effective to evaluators and researchers, but also allows for sustainability of continual education programs to those in need. As offered by Stillman and Denison (2011) the incorporation of ICTs and, and by extension the use of social media, can allow researchers, practitioners and academics the opportunity to track and map activities through various technology platforms available. This use provides a needed service for training and education allowing for the incorporation of social media message strategies that can further the reputation of those providing the training (Noor-Ul-Amin, 2013; Robertson, 2011; Evans & Mathur, 2003). This research provides a niche area for sustainable training initiatives when additional funding is terminated.

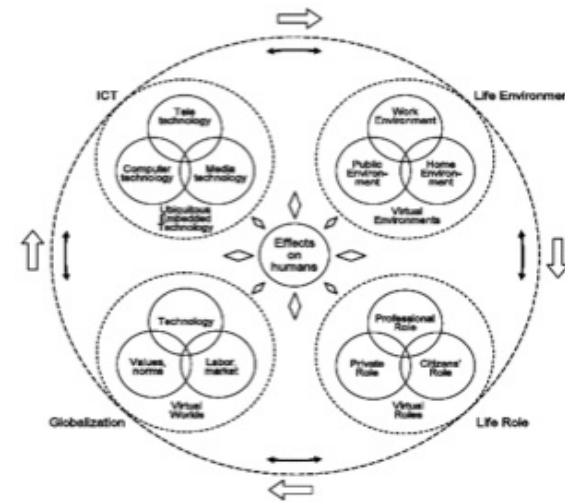
With the advent of data collection software what was once a costly undertaking is now a click away. The incorporation of ICTs has shifted the how, who and why certain groups of individuals are contacted to respond to certain questionnaires. It can be suggested that the incorporation of ICTs may be useful in program sustainability once external funding is no longer provided. This goes along with Stillman and Denison's (2011) conclusion that the use and incorporation of Bradley's model provides a way to analyze how to build trust and by extension sustainability in through technology networks. As ICTs provide researchers with new and better ways to collect and organize data and interact with respondents. It is through these survey gateways that researchers are able to focus human reality either direction or in directly. Understanding how and why people believe, buy, and act the way they do allows for a more focused public relations or advertising/marketing campaign.

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**Appendix A**

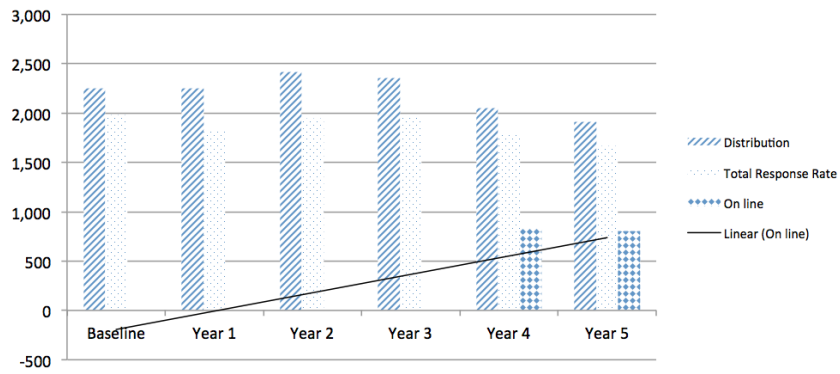
**Figure 1. Convergence Model on ICT and Psychosocial Model (Bradley, 2010)**

Year	Distribution	Response		Response Rate
Baseline		1,982	88.0%	88.0%
Year 1	2,253	1,836	81.5%	81.5%
Year 2	2,412	1,942	80.5%	80.5%
Year 3	2,359	1,971	83.6%	83.6%
Year 4	2,047	1,784	Online: 829/46.5%	87.2%/40.5%
Year 5	1,910	1,667	Online: 806/48.3%	87.3%/42.2%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10,0981</b>	<b>11,182/3,541</b>	<b>Online: 1,635/46.2%</b>	<b>**</b>

**Appendix B**

**Table 1. GEAR UP TN Survey Distribution and Response**

\*\* Due to the shift in data collection methods, a comprehensive analysis was not conducted.



**Appendix C**

**Figure 2.** Histogram shows student survey participation throughout the project, including on line.



 8

## Caught between Two Worlds: CSR Activities of Swiss Corporate Foundations

**Daria Tamagni**  
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Paper presented the BledCom at its annual conference  
in Bled, Slovenia, July 4 - 5, 2014.

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### INTRODUCTION

Faced with the fierce economic situation and an increasingly globalized economy, corporations nowadays are not only confronted with more competition, but they are also expected to be good corporate citizens. Giving something back to society in which they are prospering in is increasingly demanded by the public, or put differently, acting socially responsible is no longer a “nice-to-do”, it has now become a “have-to-do”, expected from various stakeholders (Epstein 2005, 26). Under this light, the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained ground during the last decades. “The Economist” stated in 2008 that “Corporate Social Responsibility, once a do-gooding sideshow, is now seen as a mainstream” (The Economist, 2008). Other scholars forecasted “it appears that the corporate social responsibility concept has a bright future because, at its core, it addresses and captures the most important concerns of the public regarding business and society relationships” (Carroll, 2006, p. 26).

Answering to these growing expectations, corporations increased their philanthropic activities and generally speaking it can be said that corporate giving has developed over the years and is today better organized and thought through than it used to be some years ago. Various kinds of social commitments have evolved, ranging from formal internal structures to totally separate legal entities such as corporate foundations (Keinert, 2008).

Corporate foundations are independent legal, charitable entities. They have been set up by a corporation and derive their financial resources primarily from the corporation (Eckhardt et al., 2012; European Foundation Center, 2007).

They are a prominently used instrument for CSR – in fact, in 2011 the vast majority of corporations in the USA, namely 82%, reported having an own foundation (Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy (CECP), 2012).

Investing in such an independent legal entity signals an engagement of long duration from the corporation. It is a long-term commitment with outstanding characteristics compared to other CSR activities such as environmental programs within the corporation.

Through its company relations, the foundation is situated in an area of conflict between the welfare of the corporation as well as the welfare of society. Corporate foundations exist between two different worlds, the “corporation” and “foundation.” The first is allocated in the profit sector of society, whereas the latter is part of the non-profit segment (Meffert, Then, & Fritsch, 2006). The two worlds have different mechanisms and objectives; a business logic aiming to generate profit versus the aim to increase the welfare of society and have a positive social impact. The corporate foundation is on the one hand an instrument to implement the engagement of the company and must also in some way be related back to it. On the other hand, the foundation has to benefit society at large. The interest of the business should not prevail (Graf Strachwitz & Reimer, 2008). In the majority of cases, the corporate foundation bears the name of the corporation, making a favorable connection towards the business and enforce the corporate identity of it. But this also enforces the field of tension, as in this connection, also a danger of the foundation just seen as a PR-instrument with no substance behind it, could lie. The challenge is to overcome the conflict inherent in combining a foundation with a corporation and to make clear that it doesn’t serve as a mere instrument of the political and public relations interests of the corporation but has a clear charity purpose (Mecking, 2006).

According to Smith the goal would be to establish a relationship between philanthropy and business in which neither gets the upper hand (C. Smith, 2003).

Furthermore, at the same time as the public expects corporations to engage in social causes, the difficult economic situations as well as the competitive marketplaces have also put pressure on companies to justify their philanthropic giving by demonstrating their value-added character. As stated by Porter and Kramer (2002) “executives increasingly see themselves in no-win situation, caught between critics demanding ever higher levels of corporate social responsibility and investors applying relentless pressure to maximize short-term profits” (Porter & Kramer 2002, 5). As a consequence of this dilemma, the focus has often shifted to what is called strategic philanthropy, which creates benefits for both the company as well as the beneficiary actors (Smith 2012, 372).

Under this light, it is especially interesting to see how corporate foundations handle the situation of having a corporation as a donor that might claim benefits for itself through the activities of the foundation. This way of joining forces might not always meet the conditions that society defined for charitable entities and challenges corporate foundations.

As of these outstanding characteristics, the study took corporate foundations as its unit of analysis to gain a profound knowledge and understanding of their nature, especially considering today’s landscape of corporate giving and the expectations address towards it.

### Distinct national patterns of CSR – focus on Switzerland

The hallmark of CSR and corporate philanthropy being a truly global idea might lead to the assumption that national dynamics are secondary or even irrelevant. However, while CSR might be of global nature, recent research suggests that it is applied differently across various social, economic, cultural, legal and political contexts (Gjølberg, 2009; F. Martin, 2005; Matten & Moon, 2007). Distinct national patterns of CSR exist, and the nationality of a company matters in relation to its CSR practices and performance. In this light, there have also been a few studies on CSR in Switzerland analyzing the motives of the companies to engage in CSR, the public opinion towards it, as well as CSR communication (Birth, Illia, Lurati, & Zamparini, 2008; Ryser, 2010; Zürcher Hochschule Winterthur, 2006).

This study has therefore chosen to focus on one national context and put its focus on Switzerland as of various reasons. First of all, Switzerland is a very favorable legal context for setting up foundations, with just three conditions that need to be met: dedication, property and a clear purpose are compulsory to set up a foundation (Die Bundesversammlung der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft, 1907). Furthermore, Switzerland has a philanthropic tradition of more than six centuries. One of the oldest enlisted foundations, the “Inselspital” (University Hospital of Bern), was founded in 1354 and still exists (Fondation 1976, 2010).

Swiss corporations are embedded in this long tradition and favorable context and have increasingly begun to meet the aforementioned expectations from society by setting up their own foundations. Out of the 95 members of SwissFoundations, the association of Swiss grant-making foundations, every seventh has been founded by a corporation and is nowadays incorporated in its context (Eckhardt, Jakob, & von Schnurbein, 2012). According to SwissFoundations this may reflect the fact that also in Switzerland corporate foundations are used as a means to reach the CSR goals of a company. But despite the aforementioned facts as well as the flourishing sector of foundations in general (Eckhardt et al., 2012), there is a lack of literature when it comes to in-depth studies on Swiss corporate foundations.

When comparing the promising legal context in Switzerland with the academic literature, the latter cannot reflect the richness of the first one. Compared to corporate philanthropy in the USA, where it has its roots and a considerable academic body of knowledge (Schnurbein & Bethmann, 2010), the data in Switzerland is very scarce. Although the overall sector of foundations is still growing in the cash amount of donations as well as in the number of setting-ups of new foundations (Eckhardt et al., 2012), there is a lack of literature when it comes to in-depth studies specifically of corporate foundations. As the Center for Philanthropy Studies (CEPS) based at the University of Basel stated, the philanthropic engagement of corporations in Switzerland has been scarcely explored so far. Two questions were especially relevant for the CEPS: the relationship between business and the charitable engagement as well as the examination of the forces behind successful corporate philanthropy (Schnurbein & Bethmann 2010, 47). Corporate foundations are included in these fields of interest but the research on the Swiss sector is very scarce. Therefore, as a second rationale to focus on Switzerland, this study was designed to fill this

gap of literature in such a promising environment. By assessing the activities of corporate foundations in Switzerland through an analysis of their nature, the study aims to delve deeper into this special kind of corporate social responsibility that seem to be caught between two worlds. The focus of the study therefore lies on exploring the rationale and personality of Swiss corporate foundations as well as their connection to the funding corporation.

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

RQ1: What is the rationale behind setting up the foundation?

RQ2: What are the current perceptions of CSR among a sample of corporate foundations in Switzerland?

RQ3: What significance does the foundation have compared to other CSR activities (if any) of the corporation?

RQ4: What are the benefits reflecting on the corporation and on the other side how can the foundation profit from its connection to the corporation? Where do the synergies lie?

RQ5: How much are internal and external stakeholders involved in the activities of the foundation?

RQ6: How does the foundation communicate its engagement to its internal and external stakeholders?

RQ7: How is the impact of the activities of the foundation measured?

### Operationalization of the research questions

Corporate foundations do exist in Switzerland, but from a legal point of view no overall encompassing definition exists. The term is therefore now defined to guide the analysis and give a solid base also for the sampling. Extracting from a Swiss source, the Stiftungsreport 2012, as well as a European view, the European Foundation Center, this study understands corporate foundations as follows:

It is a private, charitable foundation that derives its financial resources primarily from the corporation. In the majority of the cases, the foundation maintains close ties to the donor corporation, but is from a legal point of view an independent, separately constituted entity. The foundation can either have its own assets or be supported by regular contributions. The distribution of financial resources is done either through grant-making, operational programs or a combination of the two (Eckhardt et al., 2012; European Foundation Center, 2007).

As German, the language in which most interviews have been conducted in, does not have a specific terminology for this type of corporate foundations, the researcher was very careful to understand how the foundation and corporation are interconnected and only selected corporate foundations that are in line with the definition above.

A distinct characteristic from other foundations is that it has been set up by the corporations or in the name of the corporation. In most of the cases the name of the two entities are aligned, but this is not an indicator whether the foundation counts as a corporate foundation. Foundations

that have been set up as a social security system of the personnel of the corporation has not been included in the sample. The terms CSR on the other hand have been left in part to the understanding of the interviewee, as the study did not want to limit the perceptions. This gives room to a pluralistic understanding of CSR in each foundation and does not bind it to false statements that were adapted to the definition given.

## METHODOLOGY

Given the lack of a profound academic knowledge on Swiss corporate foundations, the study used qualitative in-depth interviews to focus on individual detailed explanations with the aim of delving deeply into fewer corporate foundations to also demonstrate the potential variety of perspectives (Flick, 2009). The interviews were based on an interview guide consisting of 17 questions, which were structured according to the overall topics of the research questions. The questions have been revised at half way of data collection to verify their validity.

As in Switzerland corporate foundations are subject to the same rules and regulations as other foundations, neither statistics nor lists exist on the number and name of corporate foundations. Therefore, the researcher systematically located corporate foundations by mainly relying on clusters of companies with a high potential for engaging in CSR: 1) big or in the economic landscape important companies as well as traditional brands, 2) members of platforms specialized in CSR or corporate philanthropy. The decision for the first cluster derived from the fact that, as supported by the literature, bigger corporations are more engaged in charitable causes. But since traditional companies as well as family businesses play a crucial role in Switzerland as well, they could not be neglected and were taken into account regardless of their size. The second cluster amplified the pool by considering companies of varying size and orientation that were members of a platform closely connected to the topic of interest.

In total, around hundred corporate foundations have been identified, of which 60 have been approached for an interview. With a response rate of almost 60% (17 positive and 18 negative answers), the researcher interviewed in the end 17 people from 16 different foundations during the months of April and May 2013. After the interviews, the researcher had to exclude two foundations from the sample, as they did not correspond to the definition set up for this study. Both foundations hold securities in the corporation and have not been established as pure CSR instruments from the corporation. Therefore, the final sample consisted of 15 interviewees from 14 different corporate foundations. Out of these 14 foundations, two belonged to the same funding corporation, resulting in a sample composed by 13 different corporations. The possibility to conduct interviews with various foundations belonging to one corporation gave interesting insights on how corporate foundations can vary when even being funded by the same corporation.

The sample comprised especially large funding corporations with only three out of fourteen funding corporation being SMEs with less than 250 employees. This reflects the findings of Gentile & Lorenz (2012) stating that bigger companies are normally more engaged in charitable causes.

These corporations represented 8 industries although the majority was from the Banking and Insurance sectors, reflecting the economic landscape in Switzerland.

The majority of interviews, namely 15, were conducted face-to-face to have a better possibility to interact, assess nonverbal nuances and experience the spirit within each foundation. (Brosius, Koschel, & Haas, 2008; Gläser & Laudel, 2009).

To be able to capture each foundation and its personality at its best and to ensure as much internal and external validity as possible, the researcher always collected background information



Figure 1 Composition of the sample - industries

on the corporate foundation before conducting the interview. This helped develop an understanding for the nature of the foundation and enabled the researcher to dig deeper into some specific aspects during the interview. Furthermore, especially considering the communication channels, the researcher supplemented the data from the interviews by analyzing websites and possible social media channels as well. This cross-checking of multiple data sources helped see how much evidence converged. Using the method of data triangulation (Golafshani, 2003; Patton, 2002; Suter, 2011), the researcher additionally spoke to the director of SwissFoundations, the association for Swiss grant-making foundations, after having conducted all the interviews with the foundations. This allowed the researcher to analyze the research questions from multiple perspectives and ensure as much internal and external validity as possible (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011).

## RESULTS & FINDINGS

The main purpose of this study was to analyze corporate foundations in Switzerland by assessing their activities through an analysis of their nature. As a first step, the sampling process offered the researcher the possibility to gain a first understanding of the corporate foundations landscape in Switzerland by identifying the key corporate foundations.

The findings indicate that corporations have multilayered responsibilities and setting up a corporate foundation was also in Switzerland one way to respond to their responsibility towards society. It represented one part within the idea of giving something back to society, complementing other CSR activities. A corporate foundation was not only a good tool to implement this plan, but additionally offered the possibility of having an entity that was separated from the business and which could therefore guarantee a certain degree of independence. In every instance, the decision to set up a foundation came from the top management team. This supported the results of various studies such as Ryser (2010) that the top management had the most important influence (82.6%) when it came to the emergence of social responsibility within the firm.

### Rationale behind setting up own foundation

The sample showed that the focus of setting up a foundation primary laid on altruistic reasons, the possibility and will to give something back to society, reflecting the legal requirements of charity. Egoistic motives such as an enhancement of the image of the corporation were only named by a minority, namely four foundations. Furthermore, it didn't clearly emerge from the interviews in how far such egoistic motives played a primary role or were just seen as welcomed side effects.

### Connection to funding corporation – proximity or independence

A central piece to understand the characteristics of corporate foundation was the connection to the funding corporation. Legally speaking, corporate foundations are independent entities with a clear separation from the budget of the core business as well as from direct business processes. However, by looking at different indicators the researcher could identify two positions on how interviewees perceived themselves to be connected to the funding corporation. Five interviewees emphasized the connection to the corporation and were characterized by a strong thinking in terms of corporate identity. Respondents referred to the corporation when speaking about “we” and classified the foundation as being one part of the bigger construct. However, the majority of foundations in the sample could be found on the other side of the continuum; eight interviewees contrasted this description by clearly stating that they were independent from the funding corporation. Half of the foundations classified at this end of the spectrum even had offices outside the corporate building.

The results show that the topic of independence was very prominent in each interview and was also discussed controversially. Corporate foundations tended to highly stress their autonomy and freedom from the corporation, but could not neglect the fact that they were still somehow

connected. First of all they frequently - in twelve out of fourteen foundations - carried the same name as the corporation and furthermore the financial ties with the corporation as well as other organizational structures made a complete independence questionable. The primary goal of each corporate foundation is however also from a legal point of view an altruistic one in any case; the profit-oriented of the corporation should by any means not interfere here. However, in the view of the researcher, a connection to the corporation also bears the chance to enhance the altruistic aim and support projects in manifold ways that would otherwise not be possible. Caught between these two worlds, corporate foundations have to build their own identity and position themselves to the outside world.

Another question that was never directly brought up but that built a central part of the discussion around corporate foundations was in how far a corporate foundation is actually used in a strategic way to support and maybe also conduct some business of the corporation. The proximity of the thematic focus as well as the geographical proximity of the projects of the foundation to the business activities of the corporation could have sometimes led to the assumption that foundations are a prolonged arm of the business and therefore have a strategic business focus instead of a pure altruistic aim. As some interviewees argued that such a thematic and geographical connection was needed to join forces, others saw the risk of it as being misused for the interest of the corporation in the name of tax-exemption and charity. Actively supporting the context the corporation was acting in bridged back to the idea of strategic philanthropy by Porter and Kramer (2006). According to the authors, corporations should “focus on the areas where social and economic interests intersect, and apply distinctive corporate resources, not just money, to solving social challenges” (Porter & Kramer, 2006, p.193). Companies who use their charitable effort to improve their competitive context would in the end not only benefit society, but also themselves. This is a very sensitive question in regards to corporate foundations. As a charitable foundation they are exempted from taxes and have to strictly exclude any business purposes of their projects. In a study of Switzerland by Schnurbein & Berthmann it emerged that corporations value the positive contribution towards society rather more than an image improvement (Schnurbein & Berthmann, 2010). In how far strategic thoughts really played a role in the case of corporate foundations in Switzerland and during the decision to set up a foundation did not clearly emerge from this study. While the benefit of image transfer has been named, it was never mentioned as a distinct reason to set up a foundation. Furthermore, the researcher came across a discrepancy when arguing pro or contra of such spill-overs, which reflects the picture of other studies conducted where some see strategic decisions as part of the decision making to some extent, whilst others do not support this hypothesis. But it can be said that certain corporations may have taken some additional aspects which benefit themselves into consideration, such as tax-exemption and a positive image transfer. For corporate foundations the question not only emerged to which degree strategic decisions were taken into account, but also to which degree they would be legitimate and accepted by society, especially as they claim to be independent. That is a question that will also be discussed in the context of potential conflicts of interest.



### **Strengths & weaknesses of Swiss corporate foundations**

As one interviewee put it right to the point and reflected the understanding of the majority of interviewees, corporate foundations offered both the possibility to have a connection to a corporation but also to be independent through their legal status. The foundation rendered possible “[...] this certain distance, which permits a certain independence, but also offers the advantages of a neighborhood, of an immediate proximity.” By having a corporation standing behind ones back does not only offer financial stability, but also the possibility to make use of synergies and an immense pool of knowhow. Six foundations in the sample strongly emphasized this advantage and even if the field of activities of the two entities was not connected, a big network of services of the corporation was offered on which the foundation could rely and make use of.

But being associated with a corporation was not without risks. As encountered by two foundations in the sample, “we have reached out to experts, world class experts, and some of them refused to work with us. Not for their personal reasons, but to protect their own reputation.” The bad reputation of the corporation had a negative impact on the work of the foundation and constrained possible collaborations with external partners. This is especially worth mentioning as corporate foundations are legal separate entities, but as the example has shown, the funding corporation can have a strong indirect impact on the work of its foundation.

A risk that has been named by one third of the interviewees was the danger of being encroached as a PR instrument to cover actions of the corporation. Using it as a cover-up to polish the image of the corporation was named to be a possible instrument corporations may make use of.

Even though strategic decisions in benefits of the corporation had not been at the forefront when deciding to set up a foundation, it clearly emerged that not only the foundation can benefit from its connection to a corporation, but the funding corporation can derive its advantages from having set up its own foundation as well. One of the main benefits named by all interviewees was an image transfer both to the inside and outside of the corporation. Five foundations said that internally it made employees proud and motivated them.

The feel good factor that foundations produced did not only motivate internal stakeholders, external ones such as clients and partners as well played an important role and have been named by eleven interviewees. As brought to attention by the majority of interviewees, people wanted more than just a corporation that conducts its casual activities. They looked for a company that supported things beneath the commercial field. And even more, they wanted corporations that were credible in what they were doing. Especially some industries were struggling in the last years under the weight of the financial crisis and the scandals emerging from it. In being a very concrete vehicle or instrument on how to support society, corporate foundations could help build this credibility which is so much needed nowadays.

### **Communication**

As underlined by various scholars, communication of CSR is a double-edged sword and a very sensitive area as it might breed skepticism. Therefore, it was the aim of this study to build an understanding in how far the corporate foundation sector in Switzerland reflected this

characteristic.

The insecurity but also prudence connected to this sensitive topic could be felt during the interviews with various Swiss corporate foundations. Participants stressed the fact that communication was needed and saw in it an immense potential, but as one interviewee put it “[...] communication is something very difficult and when it turns out to be about philanthropy it is even more difficult.” In some industries the public was a priori skeptical. Extensive self-promotion of the foundation might breed the skepticism that the foundation just acted as a prolonged arm of the business of the corporation. Therefore, the communication was seen as a balance act between communicating about the activities and decreasing messages that could be too self-congratulatory. As the research has shown, this was reflected in a rather conservative communication, which was mainly just about informing in an objective and transparent way about the foundation, without putting too many emotional messages in it.

As researches stated (Waddock & Googins, 2011), especially when the trust in business is low, the paradox of presenting the charitable activities but not breed skepticism is enforced. Results from the study supported the literature. The bank industry, which has a low level of trust in Switzerland due to recent scandals, was the one most concerned about the fact that the public could see it as a pure PR instrument. It was in this context that it is especially challenging to communicate social activities, fearing that it could back flash on the business. These results reflected the findings of the Swiss CSR monitor of 2006, which focused its attention on the bank and pension fund industry and came to the conclusion that around 70% of the population thinks that corporations engage in CSR activities to polish their image. This research supported the thesis that not only national patterns, but also peculiarities of industries matter.

As stated in the literature, stakeholders expect not only authenticity and transparency, but ongoing and interactive communication and information exchanges built on relationships. The study could not see these expectations as being implemented by the foundations. In most cases the communication was one-directional, fostering more a monologue than an active dialogue. The trend that internal constituents are absolutely critical to the authentic reputation and outcome of the corporation could strongly be supported by the research. As employees increasingly begin to express concerns on how the company they work for is fulfilling its obligations towards society, corporations react to this and put more emphasize on internal communication. Corporate communication channels have been leveraged to spread the message of the existence of the foundation within the company, putting importance on the fact that employees know what their company is involved with.

### **Conflicts of interest inherent in the nature of corporate foundations**

The special constellation that corporate foundations are caught between two worlds leads to various potential conflicts of interest. The foundation needs to bring forwards its projects and support charitable causes and is at the same time dependent from a corporation.

The findings clearly show that there are various areas where potential conflicts of interest can



emerge and on which corporate foundations need to put a focus on when setting up and maintaining a foundation. The researcher carved out these aspects and set up recommendations. If saying and doing are not congruent, it might furthermore be seen to be a pure PR instrument and lose credibility. The researcher therefore recommends focusing especially on the following constellations when asking the question in how far forces should be joined and how the foundation wants to position itself to the inside and outside.

The first point to take into consideration is about the projects the foundation wants to get involved in. In how far should they be congruent with the ones of the business and what are the benefits the grantees can profit of are hereby central deliberations. Furthermore, it is important to reflect on the aspects in how far the foundation can benefit from the infrastructure of the corporation and what risks would it face in being too (dis-)connected.

A second key aspect regards the composition of the board of trustees of the foundation. The query lies in the fact if internal employees of the corporation should also sit in the board of trustees of the foundation. Stressing the importance of independence and then presenting a board with just internal representatives of the corporation might breed skepticisms and allow critical voices to see a discrepancy between saying and doing. Contrary, solely external experts might lead to the impression that there is no possibility to benefit from corporate resources and knowledge. The foundation must therefore be very clear about why it has chosen a specific composition and how it wants to guarantee its thematic independence.

In financial terms the corporation has various ways on how to support its foundation. Possibilities are annual contributions or a fixed amount at the set-up of the foundation. Different constellations might lead to different structures of interdependence and should therefore be examined. If the foundation receives annual funds, the authority of the foundation should be questioned in no way. Another aspect that needs to be thought over concerns the channels of communication. The choice has to be made in how far corporate channels should be used to leverage the communication of the foundation. Websites that stand alone might lead to another impression for the public than sections about the foundation included in the corporate website. Consequently, the communication needs to be in line with the general understanding of how much corporation and foundation should be connected.

Last but not least, the question emerged how the foundation wants to reflect its identity and position through its allocation within the organizational structure. Hereby, it has to be clarified whether it is a component of the broader CSR department, and thus a part of the whole corporate construct, or whether it wants to stand alone in a separate building.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Corporations are increasingly faced with expectations from various stakeholders to act socially responsible and give something back to society. This study looks at the Swiss corporate

foundations landscape and confirms that corporations increasingly assume this responsibility assigned to them also by setting up their own foundations. Corporate foundations constitute a part of the foundation landscape in Switzerland and are used also by Swiss companies as an instrument to act socially responsible. Through the sampling process of this study around 100 Swiss corporate foundations could be identified.

The findings of the study clearly indicate that corporate foundations have distinct characteristics compared to other CSR activities of corporations, making strong advantages but also challenges emerge. Their legal independence coupled with the possibility to make use of synergies with the corporation presents a unique opportunity to support charitable causes. However, the advantages can unfold as challenges; Swiss corporate foundations seem to be caught between two worlds. As a consequence of acting in the intersection between the corporate and societal world, the question about proximity or independence emerged to be a central one around which different aspects of corporate foundations circled. The researcher could gather all the different discussion points around this aspect in one main question: How much should the foundation and the business join forces and benefit from each other?

Legally, foundations are independent entities and have to fulfill the preconditions of charity to have a non-profit status. Therefore, corporations are not allowed to use their foundations as a prolonged arm of business and implement their own goals. However, across this boundary, it turned out that each foundation had its own understanding of independence and how it should be implemented. The majority in the sample however clearly stressed the importance of independence to also keep credibility high.

Emerging around this central question the researcher could identify some areas of conflict in various fields of activities as well as the setup of corporate foundations. The researcher carved out aspects that corporate foundations need to put a special focus on when setting up and maintaining a foundation. They include the composition of the board of trustees, the thematic and geographic choice of projects, the choice of communication channels, the position within the organizational structure as well as the model of financial support. These aspects illustrate the fact that the question of proximity or independence has an influence on various areas of corporate foundations that in the end need to be handled in a congruent way.

### Limitations and indications for future research

Due to its qualitative character the study cannot claim to be representative for the Swiss sector of corporate foundations. The focus was laid on in-depth interviews that would give the chance to reveal soft factors such as culture, identity and perception of how the foundation is positioned within the corporation. Interesting findings emerged from this study and through its exploratory nature the ground has been set on which future research can build on.

In the regard of in-depth research, some aspects need to be taken into consideration when looking at the results. First of all, the sample was composed of foundations whose funding corporations

were based in different industries. This might have biased the interviewees in some questions, foremost when the ones about disadvantages of being a corporate entity as well as of potential risks of a strong communication arose. Future research could focus on the question of how far the industry of the funding corporation influences the perceptions of corporate foundations in more detail. As the research showed, banks tend to focus more on questions of image and reputation, maybe other industries like pharmaceutical or insurance have other peculiarities that were not studied yet.

Another point that needs to be added is the fact that the sample contains mainly big corporations. As foundations tend to be coupled to corporations that are big in size, research was focused on big economic centers such as Zurich, Geneva and Basel and the researcher could barely find SMEs that had set up their own foundation. It would be interesting to have a closer look specific on SMEs. Studies have shown that SMEs and especially family businesses highly support charitable causes, but it might not be very apparent.

Looking from an outside perspective, the question of credibility has been mentioned oftentimes and raises an interesting topic: are corporate foundations more credible than CSR emerging directly from the business? As an interviewee put it, the foundation landscape needs to go through a self-reflection process by asking itself if the public requests such engagements of corporations and if yes how. Perceptions of the public are a topic that has not been analyzed so far in the field of corporate foundations. In this regard it would furthermore be interesting to see how much corporations can benefit from their foundation in terms of reputation and image.

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## Offline goes online: does the Internet implement or supplement our communication?

Kaja Tampere

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### Abstract

This paper will be looking at the computer/code-mediated communication between organizations and people. Questions, for which answers will be sought in the present conceptual paper, are the following: does the Internet supplement or implement our communication? Supplement by filling in pieces of relationships that we would otherwise be missing out on; implement by creating or sustaining relationships that otherwise would not exist? How are relationships that were formed offline sustained online? How does the Internet change the concept of 'long-distance' in terms of communicating relationships?

To study the topic of this paper, a literary analysis will be performed. The argument will be based on the example of Facebook. As the critical voices (in psychology, neuroscience and also social sciences) are often the loudest, a middle ground will be sought, if it even exists for balance in argument. The study will focus on examples and theories covering the Western world where the research has been conducted and claims made. This means that a large part of the world is left out, but for the sake of clarity of the argument and un-ambiguity of the facts, it will be presumed that the Western world is talked about only.

**Keywords:** Internet, communication, relationships, social media

## Introduction

We are now past the times when we could (and would) argue over the importance of the Internet and whether it is here to stay. In the Western world, and a few bigger countries in the East a lot (if not the most) people use the Internet daily. The Internet, despite being a fairly new 'commodity', has in itself already changed into what we call Web 2.0 – the participatory web, rich with information, centred around the user. We are connected not just through our computers, but also through our smartphones, checking emails, Twitter and Facebook regularly. Our social lives have merged online: keeping in touch with friends on the other side of the world has never been easier, our Facebook "friends" help keep track of and contact or communicate with colleagues, school friends, family, acquaintances, friends. Physical distance is becoming more and more irrelevant with free instant messaging and video chats being available.

In addition to our social lives having an online agenda, more and more professional connections move from just digital toward the influence sphere of social media. We have the world in our hands and seemingly things could not be better. But this hyper-connectivity comes at a price. The negative effects internet-usage include, for example, internet addiction and resulting antisocial behaviour, changes in our cognitive and learning abilities and loss of privacy online. The importance of the Internet and the gadgets (providing connection) are so immersed in our lives that functioning daily – working, studying, searching for information, communicating – would become difficult without an Internet connection. It has become such a natural part of our lives that perhaps we are even unaware of the effects of the Internet on ourselves, our lives, and relationships. Could it be because the benefits of the Internet are so much greater than the possible costs on our lives? There is a lot of talk on the negative effects of the Internet, but this research aims to attempt to seek equal weight to the other side of the argument.

Questions for which answers will be sought in the present conceptual paper, are the following: does the Internet supplement or implement our communication and relationships? Supplement by filling in pieces of relationships that we would otherwise be missing out on; implement by creating or sustaining relationships that otherwise would not exist? How are relationships that were formed offline sustained online? How does the Internet change the concept of 'long-distance' in terms of communicating relationships?

To study the topic of this paper, a literary analysis will be performed on the existing research. The argument will be based on the example of Facebook – the main case study as an example used in this paper. As the critical voices (in psychology, neuroscience and also social sciences) are often the loudest, a middle ground will be sought, if it even exists for balance in argument. The study will focus on examples and theories covering the Western world where the research has been conducted and claims made. This means that a large part of the world is left out, but for the sake of clarity of the argument and unambiguity of the facts, it will be presumed that the Western world is talked about only. This research will not be looking at human-computer relationships (e.g. "sociable robots" in *Alone Together* by Sherry Turkle), but only the computer/code-mediated

communication and relationships between people. It will also not be covering relationships formed online (e.g. on dating sites) in depth.

As the topic is much talked about among academia and everyday users of the Internet, further and more detailed knowledge on the topic can only be a benefit. Some aspects of the effect of the Internet are already covered, but the phenomenon is new and happening right now, so new and emerging nuances should be studied further. The examination and analysis of the existing academic research should help define a more precise gap in knowledge, which will be the motivation for studying the topic further. The hypothesis this paper sets off with, is that there is no clear middle way or universal truth that can answer the questions posed earlier.

The first part of this essay will be focusing on the relationship between the Internet, social networking sites and our daily lives. Simply put – our digital[ised] lives. By situating ourselves in the coded context, we move on to the second part of the paper, which will be talking about the effect of the digitalisation of lives on people. The third chapter will be talking about social media mediated relationships. A conclusion will be provided and the research questions answered in the final part of this paper.

## Technology's place in today's world and our lives

We want to start by talking briefly about the 'state of play' regarding media and the society – or more precisely the Internet in our lives. A note has to be made at this point that the discussion and analysis will be by default based on the situation in parts of the Western world and Asia, where internet is easily accessible to people. This, undoubtedly, writes a certain bias into the whole discussion, but it is a necessary concession to make to keep it focused and narrow. The digital divide is a different and broad subject to discuss, but for the sake of clarity, this paper is based on the information and data available from countries such as USA, most of Europe, some Asian countries, Australia etc – in other words, countries and regions with high level of Internet penetration in the society. However, it must also be noted that there is a slight inclination towards an American dominance, because a large number of respected Internet scholars are from there. Keeping that in mind, and not dwelling in cultural specificity, generalisations can still be made based on the patterns that emerge, applied to a broader understanding of the Internet in the world.

When people think about the technologies we use that work with software and their importance in our everyday lives, the important fact is that mostly people do not think about it at all. Our generation is so accustomed to having technology and software making our lives easier that they tend to go unnoticed – ubiquitous technologies and software. The reason why I have included software into this paper is illustrated by this quote by a new media scholar Lev Manovich (2000):



“To understand the logic of new media we need to turn to computer science. It is there that we may expect to find the new terms, categories and operations, which characterize media which became programmable. From media studies, we move to something which can be called software studies; from media theory - to software theory.” (Manovich, p. 48)

‘To understand the logic of new media’ could be used as an umbrella goal of this paper. We need to go through software studies, to understand the implications of the new technologies on our lives and relationships. Software is therefore “not only “code” but a symbolic form of writing involving cultural practices of its employment and appropriation” (Fuller, 2008, p. 173). David M. Barry writes in his book *The Philosophy of Software* that “[I]ncreasingly our media is constructed on the fly from a number of modular components derived from a wide variety of networked sources. Code is therefore connective, mediating and constructing our media experiences in real-time as software” (Barry, 2011, p. 38). This is important to keep in mind when we talk about multi, cross, and trans-platform software that comprises of several media elements, like Facebook, for example.

Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge, in their book *Code/Space* talk about software in our daily environment from a spatial point of view, but also on more general terms. They argue that software is a social-material production with a profound influence on everyday life and should not be neglected when talking about communications and also our society in a broader sense. It has enabled the reorganisation and recombination of social and economic formations at different scale (Kitchin & Dodge, 2011, p. 9). And this is a credit that should be given to the software that we use on a daily basis (e.g. Facebook or MS Word or Gmail) – we take the software for granted, not thinking about the fact that it is software, not something that “just is”. Software matters because it alters the conditions through which society, space, and time are produced (Kitchin & Dodge, p. 13). We are living in a digital world, surrounded by software all around us (e.g. traffic lights, airports, cash desks in shops to name very few). Thrift calls this the ‘the technological unconscious’ because code that surrounds us is opaque and noticed only when it functions incorrectly or fails (‘Remembering the technological unconscious by foregrounding knowledges of position’). We tend to notice it when it breaks down – and it does, often so (Barry, 2011, p. 41). Software development, from a more user centred viewpoint, in a more ‘traditional’ view of using software, has resulted in new means of communication (at very low or no cost). The availability, accessibility, usability all empowers the user. Kitchin & Dodge (2011) argue that one of the key aspects of the power of software lies in how it “seduces” the user. “Software-driven technologies induce a process of interpellation, wherein people willingly and voluntarily subscribe to and desire their logic, trading potential disciplinary effects against benefits gained. And the benefits are often substantial and in a very quotidian sense, irresistible” (p. 11).

Kitchin & Dodge also make the following bold claim, which summarises the importance of talking about software in social sciences, and especially this particular paper:

“Such has been the rapid growth of software-enabled technologies it is fair to say that code now conditions existence in the West - code is routinely embedded into everyday objects, infrastructures and systems. Such is its pervasiveness that we would argue it is impossible to now live outside its orbit (even if one does not directly interact with software, much code is engaged, at a distance, in the provision of contemporary living). /---/ [T]he call for a social science perspective comes from the observation that those within the software industry tend to conceive of code in a narrow, technical or artifactual sense, instead of as complex and socio-cultural productions that do diverse work in the world. /---/ software matters. (Kitchin & Dodge, p. 260)

Thrift & French (2002) note that “Even though software has infused into the very fabric of everyday life - just like the automobile - it brings no such level of questioning in its wake” (p. 313).

When keeping in mind the pervasiveness of software in our lives and surroundings, we are not far from being cyborgs. Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* is one of the more vocal texts on the topic. “A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (Haraway, 1991, p. 149). Despite the fact that Haraway’s piece was aimed to be ironic, our relationship with machines today makes it more or less true. Sherry Turkle, one of the leading scholars on the topic of the relationship between people and technology, whose work will be discussed in depth further on in this paper, draws on her experience at MIT when “wearable computers” were experimented with. She believes that the way we are tethered to technologies today, makes us cyborgs. We are one with technology – and it has changed our lives, and the way things are done and what is expected of us. Technology has become a “phantom limb” (Turkle, 2011, p. 16). Our technologies give us security and reassurance by connectivity; we are dependent on them for more than their so called prescribed function. Natalie Dixon, in her master’s thesis talks about mobile phones as something more than simply a technology; they have taken the “affective turn”. We are affected by them, checking Facebook, anticipating a text – they become ‘actors’ in our daily functioning. In surveys in American high schools, students reported that losing a phone can “feel like death” (Turkle, p. 16).

“This is the experience of living full-time on the Net, newly free in some ways, newly yoked in others. We are all cyborgs now.” (Turkle, 2011, p. 152) Because of the way we have adapted to technology, and almost constant internet connection, we are also, for both professional and personal reasons, it is expected that people “should be available and accountable to others, visibly and transparently, at any time and place” (Green, 2011, p. 33). First, we became reachable with the emergence of mobile phones, and now – with our phones having changed into smartphones, we are also reachable by email, messages on social networking sites (Facebook and Twitter are the two social networking applications used most heavily on smartphones) and so forth. In fact, the fact that we are almost constantly connected to the internet has changed the status of phone calls into something (often overly) intimate, time consuming, too forward and awkward (for example, Turkle and Baym mention this several times in their work). Being constantly connected

has its affordances, such as working lives 'leaking' into our private lives. The blurring of the lines between work and leisure can be stressful, yet gives opportunities for working out of the office, and results in greater productivity. However, over time, "[M]ultitasking, once seen as something of a blight, was recast as a virtue. /---/ Experts went so far as to declare multitasking not just a skill but the crucial skill for successful work and learning in digital culture" (Turkle, p. 162).

When the media are always there, waiting to be wanted, people lose a sense of choosing to communicate.

Social media has become an important part of our online lives – and its importance is increasing. Several social networking sites cater our different needs, 'cloud computing' services provided by companies such as Google allow us to access our documents, contacts, emails etc from several computers, regardless of the location. Our mobile phones are often smartphones – meaning, little computers in themselves, allowing even greater mobility and accessibility, connectivity. Being dependent on and one with technology has implications beyond the mere meaning of the situation we are in. The Internet, especially social networking sites, including the most popular one in the Western world – Facebook, the luxury of connectivity comes with a price. There is much talk about the consequences of the digital traces people leave behind when they use the Internet. A more philosophical notion of the privacy, surveillance and the subsequent shifts in power relations can be drawn in from Foucault's (1977) work, with the following quote: "We are neither in the amphitheatre nor the stage but in the Panopticon machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are parts of its mechanism" (p. 217). With mobile technologies and constant Internet connection, we are both the watchers and the ones that are being watched by many people (for example by our "friends" list on Facebook) – to draw on Foucault's discussion of Bentham's prison envisagement, and the resulting subjectification. The more aware users will start behaving as if they are being watched, but most people are either unaware of, or indifferent towards what privacy online means, but this will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. In his writing, Foucault described the events of the seventeenth century plague where affected people were discovered (and separated from the rest) by counting the residents who would stand at the window – those who were ill could not stand, so in a way there was a system of "permanent registration" (Foucault, p. 196). Despite this comparison perhaps being overly dark and dramatic, but with mobile technologies, which are always connected to the Internet, and some even have GPS tracking devices, we are also in a state of (unknowingly) being permanently registered on the net.

Facebook, the example used in this study, is a remarkable application, with more than 800 million active users (Facebook Inc., Statistics). Is an extremely "attractive" piece of software. It incorporates several media into one place, bringing together many needs of an Internet user. It would not be surprising if, with the current direction of development and spread of Facebook usage, soon Facebook was the central part of the Internet. You have your social circle, both close friends, family and acquaintances in once place, all equally reachable and accessible. You can see their lives and share yours with them through status updates, uploading photos and videos, express

opinion with one click (the 'Like' function), in addition to that you can keep up to date with your favourite artists, musicians, sports etc. There are groups for hobbies and professional purpose, you can organise events – it seems like almost all aspects of life are available on Facebook. With the recent change in Facebook's user interface, into 'Timeline' – Facebook encourages to merge your whole life onto the platform. Every user's timeline starts with their birth. And this life, now online since we were born, is encouraged to be shared with the people in our friends list. We are broadcasting our lives through Facebook to a large audience with high levels of comfort, in the sense that we are comfortable with this software, with this platform (and the media formats: video, photos etc it allows), it is part of our daily routines. We access it on our phones on the go and on our computers when staying put. It is part of our lives and we rationalise it as a necessity, as with a lot of other media and technologies.

Next, we are going to look at the criticisms of the Internet in the light of what it is doing to us, to explore broader consequences of the techno-cultural situation we are in and after that we are moving to the topic of human relationships mediated by social media.

## Internet and social media affecting the people and their lives

When we talk about the criticism of the Internet and what it is doing to us, there are a few people whose work and opinion on the topic stands out. Andrew Keen was one of the early ones to criticise Web 2.0 at its early stages, and everything that came along with it, in his book titled *The Cult of the Amateur: how blogs, MySpace, YouTube and the rest of today's user generated media are killing our culture and economy* – which also roughly sums up his argument. His main worry was/is that the value of professionally produced content will be diminished and overtaken by user generated content, which is shared and copied (ad infinitum). He contrasts companies such as Time Warner and Disney with Google, making the claim that Google is parasitic by not producing any original content. He also talks about the downfall of newspapers and professional and trusted news and information sources. However, in the light of this paper, his 2008 book is already a bit dated. At the time he wrote it, the problems he outlined were perhaps more vocal, but in four years, the internet seems to have adjusted to Web 2.0, with newspapers adapting and low quality information and media content noise can be reduced to a fairly minimal levels, when the browsing the internet knowingly. This is not to say that the worries of 2008 are gone and everything is well today. New problems and new noise are born into our Internet lives.

Google dominates our Internet. It is the most used search engine, but its reach goes beyond the search function. Google is a quintessentially Web 2.0 company, providing services catering for almost all needs of the modern Internet user. The compatibility and transcendence of their services across multiple platforms and the ease of access make Google's services an easy and logical choice for the daily user. We can log onto YouTube with our Gmail account (now actually called Google account) and Blogger, to name a few. And Google search seems

to know exactly what we mean when we search for something (that, in fact, is not far from the truth, but dwelling on this beyond the scope of this paper, however the Google algorithm is a fascinating procedure). The previously described phenomena can be summarised, with some things added, as googlization. The term also used by Siva Vaidhyanathan, who criticises Google, the company; Google the search engine; Google's core principles and everything else that links to the software they provide. The term googlization connotes media concentration – an important political economy style critique of Google's taking over of one service after another online (Rogers, 2009, p. 1). Vaidhyanathan's book *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry)* is also talks about surveillance and privacy, as well as how using Google changes how we think about knowledge and also remember things. The same issues are raised by Nicholas Carr, who asks the question "is Google making us stupid"? He has been criticising the effects of the Internet from a neuroscience point of view. How we use the Internet daily – browse, skim read, and search – has a negative effect on our attention span and our knowledge is becoming shallow. Immediacy and efficiency are put before everything on the Internet, so "our ability to interpret text, to make the rich mental connections that form when we read deeply and without distraction, remains largely disengaged" (Carr, 2009, p. 91). We are also likely to be doing many things at a time, in addition to being 'shallower', but the effectiveness is an illusion because "multitaskers don't perform as well on any of the tasks they are attempting. But multitasking feels good because the body rewards it with neurochemicals that induce a multitasking "high"." (Turkle, 2011, p. 163)

Clinical psychiatrist Elias Aboujaoude MD, who is specialised in obsessive compulsive behavioural disorders, has written in length about the dangers of the Internet, its problematic use and the behavioural changes that occur. Aboujaoude (2011) refers to the "e-personality", which "despite not being real, is full of life and vitality" and is "more assertive, less restrained, a little bit on the dark side and decidedly sexier" (p. 18). He argues that from a psychological point of view "something is happening to our identity – something seems to be hijacking it – each and every time we log on" (p. 16). The changes in our identity reflect in all aspects of life. According to Turkle, the "identity work" happens where and whenever you create an avatar online. On social networking sites, where the profile becomes a sort of avatar, it is not just who you are, but also who you want to be (Turkle, 2011, p. 180). Adults, as well as adolescents use online to explore identity (Turkle, p. 153). As digital media has makes it possible to separate the body and 'self', a phenomenon which Baym (2010) calls "disembodied identity", this disembodiment opens up possibilities for both exploration and deception (pp. 105-106). It does not only come with negative effects, but such multiple identities online can make "people feel "whole" not because they are one but because the relationships among aspects of self are fluid and undefensive. We feel "ourselves" if we can move easily among our many aspects of self (Turkle, p. 194). However, Turkle (2011) also poses the question of authenticity of those online profiles – it can easily end up being someone else (fantasy of who we want to be), and what if and where do the distinctions blur (p. 153)?

The chapters in Aboujaoude's *Virtually You* touch upon most of the topics that Internet critics have also presented. They are the following: delusions of grandeur after the big success of companies

such as Google and Facebook, dotcom boom and almost instant millionaires made on the Internet (Aboujaoude, 2011, p. 44). Narcissism nurtured by the Internet by obsessing with one's digital footprint, the digital profile, as opposed to staring in the mirror (the classic example of narcissism), expecting our every need to be satisfied on/by the Internet (Aboujaoude, pp. 64-66). In addition to the Internet making us feel bigger, more powerful and potent, it can also bring out the shadier personality traits, online crime and gambling problems being just some of the examples (Aboujaoude, p. 86). We can also become more impulsive on the Internet, starting with sending drunken messages to buying excessively (which is made easy by features such as "buy now" buttons etc) and betting money online (Aboujaoude, pp. 113-114). Online and other instantaneous communications can also result in what Aboujaoude (2011) calls "infantile regression and the tyranny of the emoticon", meaning immaturity and avoiding the complexities of life in behaviour and self-expression (p. 130). By "the illusion of knowledge" Aboujaoude (2011) sides with the likes of Carr, claiming that the flickering through web content, the way we are accustomed to finding information online (Google), our information retrieval is more superficial and in the long run damaging to our cognitive abilities (Aboujaoude, p. 179). Internet addiction, although not yet registered officially as a disorder, is dangerous as we spend/waste more time online and our 'offline' activities and relationships become secondary and suffers as a result of excessive internet use (Aboujaoude, p. 202). He also talks about the loss of privacy, as do many others, especially on sites such as Facebook, where people tend to reveal a lot about themselves (Aboujaoude, p. 224). And finally, our virtual lives become more real than our real lives as distinctions between work and leisure blur and we are almost incapable of logging off (Aboujaoude, p. 262).

As briefly mentioned before, online communication, we need to rethink privacy, especially on social networking sites like Facebook. A social media researcher, Danah Boyd (2008) has talked about "exposure" and "invasion" in terms of Facebook privacy; how the technology makes social information easily accessible, but people are still uncomfortable with it (p. 14). So, on Facebook, Christian Fuchs argues: "privacy is considered to be under threat because people disclose too much information about themselves and thereby become targets of criminals and surveillance. Privacy is strictly conceived as an individual phenomenon that can be protected if users behave in the correct way and do not disclose too much information. All issues relating to the political economy of Facebook, such as advertising, capital accumulation, the appropriation of user data for economic ends, and user exploitation, are ignored." He calls it the "Facebook privacy fetishism" (Fuchs, 2011, p. 146). This is a problematic approach because:

"[It] explicitly conclude[s] that communication technologies as such have negative effects. These are pessimistic assessments of technology that imply that there are inherent risks in technology. The causality underlying these arguments is one-dimensional: It is assumed that technology as cause has exactly one negative effect on society." (Fuchs, p. 147)

A belief among scholars is also that Internet use ruins our language and grammar in terms of

language-specific nuances, as well as communication in a broader sense. One such argument is made by Boyd (2002), who claims that users do not perform on the same level of proficiency online as they do in real life because of the interactions being limited by what people can convey and perceive in mediated spaces – much is lost in digital interactions and that can lead to frustrations (pp. 38-39). The non-verbal cues which Boyd is referring to, the nuances of face-to-face communication, are also discussed by Baym (2010) who believes that not all is lost, because people also adapt to mediated communication creatively and put the social cues back when using emoticons and internet language (p. 60). She suggests that we should be asking what people do with mediated communication instead of what mediation does with communication (Baym, p. 59). In the final part of this paper, as a logical progression from the previous discussions, we will be discussing relationships mediated by communication technologies.

## Social networking and relationships

In the previous chapter, we presented a selection of theories about what is happening to us and communication because of the Internet, put shortly. This chapter will slightly overlap in scholars, because the effect of everything discussed previously, is what this paper is the broad explanation of this paper. The specific topic of social networking affecting human relationships is narrow and has not been handled much without the larger context. The key researcher on the specific topic of what technology is doing to people and the subsequent effect on interpersonal relationships is the Professor of Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT, Sherry Turkle, who has contributed also to the broader thoughts on 'internet and us'. Her work will be the starting point for this chapter. Turkle (2011), who poses the big question clear and present on the cover of her latest book *Alone Together*, "why do we expect more from technology and less from each other". According to her, technology is reshaping our emotional lives and it has become the "architect of our intimacy" (p. 1). This is an important in establishing the research interest as the outcome and implications of technology on human relationships, not merely humans using technology. Turkle believes that being "tethered to technology" leaves us actually feeling more alone. The technology that was once meant to make us more efficient in our work, is now being used to make us more efficient in our private lives because "when technology engineers intimacy, relationships can be reduced to mere connections. /---/ easy connection becomes redefined as intimacy. Put otherwise, cyberintimacies slide into cybersolitudes. And with constant connection comes new anxieties of disconnection" (Turkle, p. 16). The negative effects of connectivity also include being always connected and feeling of being among friends, but at the end of the day we do not know if we have communicated at all – "in intimacy new solitudes" (Turkle, p. 17). In some cases people also start preferring mediated communication, as being alone can seem like a precondition for being together because it is easier to communicate if you can focus, without interruption, on your screen (Turkle, p. 155). This is a bleak view of what has become of communicating, but

research supports these ideas to some extent at least, Americans have indeed reported feeling more insecure, isolated and lonely (Gusterson & Besteman, eds). However, when looking at the Turkle's work, it may seem as if technology is to blame (not the people who use the technology). We may think that emails, texts, Facebook messaging are a poor substitute for face-to-face communications, but useful when the alternative is sparse communication with the people we care about. Then, we become accustomed to their special pleasures - we can have connection when and where we want or need it, and we can easily make it go away; mobile technologies make people 'pausable' (Turkle, p.160). However, Nancy Baym, another scholar who has researched relationships in the digital world, puts forward a slightly different opinion about what the effect of Internet use is on relationships. Baym (2010), also, acknowledges the fears that internet and other digital media lead us to substitute shallow empty relationships for authentic personal connections, instead of being physically present and we may become separated, isolated, and "never more than partially anywhere" (p. 140). She says that despite the fact that introducing communication technology into relationships has problems, making people less communicative (and lonelier as a result) is not one of them (Baym, p. 141). Baym actually argues that, based on studies that look at all internet use, rather than just relational internet use, "internet users are generally more social than non-users" and "Internet users reported spending three times as long attending social events and reported significantly more conversation than non-users." (Baym, p. 142). While both scholars based their facts on empirical research, the difference in results implies a need for further studies, to find a consensus (if it even exists, as the nature of the topic is inherently ambiguous). There are more things to take into consideration, such as social influences, personalities and relationship stages, the cultural background and also peer groups that all have an effect on social relationships on social media. As for what is considered appropriate and normal, we will surely reach an "operational consensus" on these matters sooner or later (Baym, pp. 148-149).

Loneliness and the feeling of disconnection as a result of digital connections is one part of the 'problem' that arises. Social networking sites, like Facebook, in addition to the features that add meaning to communication over distance (e.g. photos giving a visual, more emotional feeling to 'staying in touch' than text-based communications), have several stumbling blocks in terms of relationships. I have touched upon the topic of privacy, but what it means in terms of relationships can be an issue. Our Facebook profiles are available (this, of course, also depends on our privacy settings) to a group of people, not just one. Maintaining private relationships on Facebook means we make them somewhat public by default. Exceptions and blocking out certain (groups of) people is the kind of effort, I would dare to say the majority of Facebook users do not bother making (this is my personal assumption based on my own Facebook use as well as people on my friends list). People in a relationship post messages on each others' so called Walls, which people on their social network can see. If people have lost jobs over Facebook status updates, it is not surprising that in relationships, Facebook can cause jealousy. The access to the partner's profile provides people with information they did not have before social networking sites. It was shown that people can become jealous seeing photos or other content where the



meaning and significance is ambiguous, because people tend to start interpreting the information as they wish. There was an additional effect of time spent on Facebook, indicating that SNS increase feelings of jealousy (Muise, Christofides & Desmarais, 2009, p. 443). In another study on jealousy in relationships and Facebook, it was found that a person's self esteem also has an effect on social networking jealousy: "findings indicate that self-esteem moderates effects of relationship satisfaction, SNS use and need for popularity on SNS relationship happiness" (Utz & Beukeboom, 2011, p. 522). The criticisms of and problems with digital connections, as outlined in previous chapters of this paper, all have an effect on our relationships, regardless of the nature of the relationship. According to Turkle (2011), "Laboratory research suggests that how we look and act in the virtual affects our behaviour in the real" (p. 223). This would mean that the 'dysfunctional' online behaviours described by Aboujaude also affect our real lives. This would mean that Carr and Vaidhyathan are right and we are in fact becoming shallower and effectively stupid because of the Internet. Turkle uses terms like "anxious" and "preoccupy" and "overly demanding" throughout the book, painting a rather dreary picture of what the internet is doing to our relationships, with only Baym offering some alternative ideas on what the real implications are. Regardless, it is obvious that there is uncertainty about the long-term effects and consensus about behavioural norms are yet to be established.

## Conclusion

The questions asked in the beginning of this paper were the following: does the Internet supplement or implement our communication and relationships? Supplement by filling in pieces of relationships that we would otherwise be missing out on; implement by creating or sustaining relationships that otherwise would not exist? How are relationships that were formed offline sustained online? How does the Internet change the concept of 'long-distance' in terms of relationships? We have tried to discuss these questions in a manner that starts from further away and comes closer. We did this to illustrate that there is no straightforward way of going about answering these questions. When we talk about the Internet and human relationships, we need to first look at the situation we are living in right now – the importance and usage of the Internet in daily lives, the importance of it. We then need to consider how the Internet is affecting us, and our society to finally be able to talk about, how the Internet affects our communication and relationships.

After studying the available materials, discussed in this paper, we have found that the Internet both supplements and implements our communication and relationships. The supplementation comes mostly into more established relationships, such as those formed offline (friendships, family, romantic relationships, some work relationships). The supplementation is most apparent and beneficial when people live busy lives and face-to-face communication time is difficult to find, as well as over physical distance. Facebook and other applications can help keep up to date with others' lives through various media that the platforms accommodate. It 'fills in the pieces'

that today's lifestyle omits, when efficiency, productivity and success seem to be some of the most valued qualities. It is also understandable that people would sacrifice some of the 'real life' communications, when we live in a largely globalised world, and in the search of a better career and salary, people travel (especially when looking at the current economic situation). The low cost of Internet communications has made separation (over distance) less traumatic. Facebook, for example, is more than just a social networking site. It now supports video chat (collaboration with Skype), in addition to instant messaging, messaging and 'wall posting'. It allows a lot more than just textual communication with photos, videos. If life's circumstances take people apart, Facebook can help them be together, over distance. Facebook also brings together old friends and acquaintances that were long lost. Some criticise the 'weak ties' that those connections are, but even offline we have weak ties, so by facilitating connection and communication, some of those weak ties can become strong ones, thanks to Facebook. We did not talk about the relationships that the Internet implements in this paper, but they exist. Dating sites and interest groups bring people together, form friendships, romantic relationships and can even result in marriages. Facebook also implements connections that are weak and become stronger thanks to Facebook. I do not mean to praise Facebook as an almighty tool that connects, reconnects and makes lives easier, because it has a lot of affordances, such as exposing too much on Facebook, loss of privacy, surveillance and untruthfulness in profile creation, but for now it seems that the pros outweigh the cons. The worries however remain, but finding solutions to them is not an easy task. It also seems that the majority of Facebook users are apathetic and actually unaware of those risks affordances of having (parts of?) their social lives merged onto this omnipotent (sic!) platform.

Updating statuses, 'liking' things on Facebook, uploading photos and videos of our lives, it is as if we are creating an online scrapbook of our lives, which we are sharing with our 'friends' list. The weak ties, the acquaintances, as well as our strong ties (mostly strong relationships offline) all see this. It is likely that the weak ties are fairly indifferent towards those 'virtual scrapbooks' despite having access to it. It is for our strong ties, the relationships formed offline that the online actions and updates become meaningful to. If we have a history with people, the actions online have a strong offline agenda, background information and context, and in this way, we sustain a connection in more affective ways than perhaps would be possible merely over the phones. We have our own social cues, familiar to our strong ties, which can remain digital noise for the more unfamiliar acquaintances. What we are trying to say, is that Facebook and the relationships (of any kind) on it are a lot more complex to just dismiss them as overly superficial and 'celebrating the weak ties'.

The scholarly materials (as well as popular science) on the topic of Internet's affect on our lives available today is in majority of critical opinion. The concerns expressed by writers such as Nicholas Carr, Elias Aboujaoude, Sherry Turkle and even Siva Vaidhyathan should by no means be ignored, because they are valid concerns and a more conscious and aware usage of our communication technologies would benefit everyone. However, we need to keep in mind that

the development and advancement of those technologies has been extremely rapid and perhaps we need to let things settle before we draw any definite conclusions. The views dominating the field are also mostly technologically deterministic, leaving out a substantial portion of societal nuances that would balance picture. Out of the scholars whose work I have covered in this paper, Nancy Baym is the one who has offered counter weight to the argument. She summarises it well:

“Digital media aren’t saving us or ruining us. They aren’t reinventing us. But they are changing the way we relate to others and ourselves in countless, pervasive ways. We stay in touch with more people for longer and across greater distances. We find and share supportive resources we could never access before. We create groups and relationships that cross boundaries we could rarely span before. In some cases, we wander into bad circumstances we would have been better off without. In some cases we find new opportunities.” (Baym, 2010, p. 153)

Despite having some excellent scholarly work on this subject, we believe that the nature of the subject is constantly changing (as we are adapting to and adapting new technologies into our everyday lives), so it should be studied repeatedly, over time. When we take the narrower topic of human communication and relationships ‘going online’, there is definitely more room for academic work to be done. Empirical studies, polls and interviews would complement new research and offer support to the already existing research. A deeper understanding of the specifics of human relationships online would benefit also the understanding of the technologies. Our communication, relationships and our relationship with technology are nuanced and in a constant state of flux, hence I want to emphasise the need for more academic attention on these issues.

We want to conclude this paper with these two finalising thoughts: “The language and forms of evidence may have changed, but the concern that communication technologies make us dumber is as old as writing” (Baym, 2010, p. 26). And “From the very beginning, networked technologies designed to share practical information were taken up as technologies of relationship” (Turkle, 2011, p. 157). We live in an amazing world surrounded by smart technologies making things possible humankind would have never even dared to dream about a few hundred years back. Moving our lives, work and leisure online (in part, at least) makes us more efficient and global, but also has affordances, such as our information retrieval habits and reading becoming more superficial. What the long term implications of the changes happening to us are, no one can say at the moment. The benefits and costs need to be re-evaluated constantly as we get used to those technologies, but we should not forget that the introduction of ‘new’ technologies is not new in our society – it takes time to adjust.

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## Towards greater resilience: the role of social media in crisis planning, management and recovery

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### Abstract

Recent crises, such as that experienced by BP in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, demonstrate the necessity of taking into account the role and uses of social media in crisis planning, management and recovery.

This short paper draws on recent examples of crisis situations, views of crisis management experts as well as recent commentary on crisis management in new circumstances to argue that effective use of social media before, at time of crisis and after will create and build resilience, mitigate difficulties encountered and allow for speedier recovery from crisis.

### Towards greater resilience

This short paper was prepared and written to take advantage of BledCom's theme this year and to revisit crisis management in the light of changes to the context for crises brought about by social media.

Henley Business School, through a teaching and research unit that examines the foundations of reputation and the quality of relationships, has a developing interest in the question of resilience in relationships. This has emerged partly from work I carried out with colleagues at Henley and in China which examined the response of Chinese authorities to the earthquake in Sichuan. This work was incorporated into a case study lodged with The Case Centre in 2012 (White and others, 2012).

Resilience is an ability to withstand shocks – it's the response that is seen after events like the bombing at the finish line of the Boston marathon in April 2013. It is naturally of great interest to governments in countries threatened by terrorism. The UK government has a large section of its Cabinet Office web pages devoted to resilience – of infrastructure, communities and businesses (Cabinet Office, 2013). Talk there is of disruptive challenges, events or circumstances that

disrupt normal life. These can be natural events such as flooding, or may occur through human intervention such as an electrical power failure or terrorist incident.

Communication systems are central in emergency planning, may be disrupted during an emergency, and emergency planning needs to take this into account.

Resilience, according to Flynn and Bates, writing from a US perspective, “is the ability to better anticipate, withstand, respond, adapt to and recover from major disruptions and dislocations” (Flynn and Bates, 2011, p. 10). They say it is the communities, companies and countries that are most resilient that will best be prepared for systemic shocks. They go on to suggest that “social media holds tremendous promise in building more resilient communities.”

## Crises

Crisis situations are extreme examples of disruptive challenges, disruptions and dislocations, on a scale that runs from difficult situations, emergencies, disasters through to crises. Crises are characterised by high levels of threat to life, property and the existence of organisations involved. They make exceptional demands on the people they affect, and the decision-makers who have to find a way through them. They are often taken by surprise, uncertain as to how to respond, ill-prepared psychologically and faced with having to make decisions and act quickly to minimize the consequences of the situation. Examples of surprise and confusion are found in different examples, such as the London bombings of July 7, 2005 and the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010.

Crises also play out in public, attracting media attention, and – over recent years – presence in social media. Over the years, they have drawn public relations practitioners into detailed planning for crisis communication, and into crisis planning more generally. They have led to the development of an important specialisation within general practice devoted to risk identification and mitigation, issues and crisis management (Griffin, 2014).

This area of practice, as with others, has had to accommodate to, and learn how to make best use of the possibilities of social media. Paradoxically, the difficulties involved in crisis situations force learning and improvements to practice.

## Crises and social media

Have social media changed the fundamental requirements of crisis management, and crisis communication? Andrew Griffin, managing director of Register Larkin, a consultancy specialising in risk, reputation and crisis management – who has also written one of the best guides to this area of public relations practice (Griffin, 2014) – believes not. In an interview (Griffin, May 22 2014) he said that social media have not changed how top level management think about crisis management, nor has his consultancy’s advice been fundamentally changed. The changes have been around the edges of practice, and in any case social media are now the ‘new normal’ as far

as practice is concerned. What is happening in social media simply has to be incorporated into crisis preparation and crisis response, but there is still an emphasis on traditional media.

He suggests that while protestors and opponents may organise through social media, what emerges in social media may just be noise, demonstrating how thin skinned some companies can be – “they may have to get over being hated.”

Nevertheless, crisis management plans now have to have social media sections, adding to the responsibilities for public relations and communication staff in the planning for crisis management. He is supported in some of his views by a recent study from Weber Shandwick of chief communications officers’ views of the changing media environment (The Rising CCO, Weber Shandwick 2014). Nearly two-thirds of CCOs (63 per cent) find traditional and social media to be equally effective for resolving a crisis or issue. Traditional media remain important, and social media have to be considered alongside them.

Griffin writes in *Crisis, Issues and Reputation Management* that social media have the potential:

- to help trigger crisis situations
- to escalate crises
- to be the source of crisis and
- to help resolve them.

An unexpected benefit from experience of crisis mentioned earlier is what can be learned from experience. Crises force learning and innovation, and this has been true as crises have brought possible uses for social media capabilities to the fore. Examples of crises forcing the development of new practices, using social media, are found in the Haitian earthquake of January 2010, which led to the development of Ushahidi, a means of sharing information about the disaster from myriad sources, and mapping information to help with disaster response, and Google’s Person Finder, which helps to reconnect people separated in disasters. Japan’s experience of an earthquake, tsunami and potentially catastrophic nuclear disaster at Fukushima Nuclear Plant in March 2011 showed the power of Twitter to inform and link people (While the World Watches, Japan Tweets its Way out of Disaster, The Wrap March 14, 2011).

## Increasing resilience

It’s clear from these recent experiences that there is much to be gained from looking to social media to increase resilience, to build relationships that will enable communities (companies and countries) withstand shocks better.

The UK Government recognizes that “resilient communications are able to absorb or mitigate the effects of a disruptive challenge.” Flynn and Bates (2011) believe that the advent of social



networking through social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and Google+ allow for the creation of trusted communities outside official channels – “a nation that was told after the attacks of September 11 to carry on as usual had in its hands the tools to build a more resilient nation” (p.8). The lessons learned in events such as the Haiti earthquake have led to further research on social media tools developed. Their capability will be expanded, but the benefits of their use will be felt in wider society.

In crisis management, emphasis has been placed on crisis planning and simulation leading to the psychological preparation of managers for the stress they will face at time of crisis. Exploring uses of social media takes psychological preparation to group and community levels. Flynn and Bates believe resilience depends on risk literacy – understanding risks and how they may be dealt with. Social media will allow for these to be discussed, openly.

Crisis planning can incorporate the possibilities for discussion of risks, for example in a company setting through internal communication through social media, or in the wider community through use of traditional and social media. Potential crises explored in crisis planning can be simulated or traced through to conclusions using scenario planning, where simulations and scenarios build in uses of social media, and the discussions that might take place through social media. Also to be modeled would be the possible loss of traditional media or other communication channels at time of crisis, when – as in the case of Fukushima – social media replace channels previously used.

In future, management of crises themselves will require a mastery of the possible uses of social media in crisis management. This will emerge through training and practice. Appendix 1 shows a new course developed by the UK's Emergency Planning College to help managers learn how the modern media work in the management of emergency response.

The role of social media in the aftermath of crisis is clearer, in helping to rebuild communities, restore activities and confidence.

## Public Relations

Crisis management is an area of management practice where public relations has already developed real expertise and has led developments. To add to this a full appreciation of the contribution of social media in strengthening and shaping response to difficult situations, it will be necessary for practitioners:

- to learn the lessons from recent emergencies, disasters and crisis situations (from detailed case studies) and
- to look to ways of using social media in future (by, for example, tapping into research now being done by leaders in the development of social media for emergency, disaster and crisis response such as Patrick Meier, formerly of Ushahidi, now working at the Qatar Computer Research Institute. His book, *Digital Humanitarians: How Big Data is Changing the Face of Humanitarian Response*, is planned for 2015, to be published by Taylor and Francis)

Finally, emphasis on resilience refocuses attention onto relationships, which are the central concern in public relations practice and, increasingly, in management and corporate governance (Tomorrow's Company, 2014).

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## Appendix

### Emergency Planning College

## Communicating with the Public in the Digital Age (NEW COURSE)

### Who should attend?

You must attend this course if you are an emergency planning officer or a communications specialist expecting to work on this aspect of your organisation's emergency response. This is a new course, designed to give you the most up-to-date and professional understanding of the way modern media works and is used in emergencies. It covers the full range of media, including conventional print, broadcast and digital social platforms. We will do this in a holistic way, designed to help you create and manage an integrated media presence in support of your responders.

### Course Aims

To enable delegates to develop an emergency communications plan which embraces both conventional and social media.

### Objectives

By the end of this course, delegates will be able to:

- Prepare an integrated emergency communications plan which embraces both conventional and social media
- Identify good practice in working with the news media
- Prepare interview briefings and press conferences for senior officers
- Evaluate the most popular social media platforms, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, as well as less-familiar social tools for monitoring and mapping, and their utility in an emergency communications plan
- Explain how effective monitoring of social media can improve shared situational awareness and support emergency management

### Additional Notes

This new two-day course replaces Working with the News Media in an Emergency and Building Social Media into your Emergency Communications Strategy. It is aimed at communications professionals and emergency planners working in Cat 1 and 2 responders.

Good communications with the public is at the heart of effective emergency response. Communications professionals and emergency managers understand the importance of deploying successful media strategies to ensure public safety. The rapid growth in the take-up of

social media is forcing them to rethink their approach to communications.

News of major events breaks first on Twitter. Radio and television stations use social media to enhance their news coverage and capture public opinion.

How should emergency managers react?

How can they mobilise the extraordinary reach of social networks to deliver a more effective response?

This course will examine the challenges facing these professionals and provide the solutions.

- See more at: <http://www.epcollege.com/epc/training/courses/courselist/communicating-with-the-public-in-the-digital-age/#sthash.ZsZFVPan.dpuf>

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## Trust and the perception of the media's role in society among young people: A case study among Slovenian students

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### Abstract

Digital media has significant implications for our lives. The perception of the media's role has changed due to the emergence of new users, so-called 'digital natives'. This paper is based on research carried out in 2013 and examines the perception of the media and its role in society and, consequently, the level of trust Slovenian students feel towards the Slovenian media. In the paper we will assume that Information Communication Technologies (ICT) have altered the perception of the media's role in society. The paper also assumes that the level of trust for the mass media is low, which is of key importance with regard to efficient public communication, specifically amongst young people who generally prefer to consume entertainment content and are more open to new technologies where news information can be obtained instantly and through different media.

For the purpose of analysis, our study consisted of two parts. In the first part, we conducted 21 interviews (students at the University of Maribor). The research questions that were asked during the interviews reflected the fact that we were interested in young people's attitudes to the media - in terms of media use throughout the day, as well as their trust and perception of the media's role in society. The results of the analysed interviews formed the basis of a specific survey, which was conducted in the latter part of the research process and was focused only on the concept of trust and the perception of the media's role in society. In the second part of our research, we carried out 220 questionnaires amongst students from the University of Maribor. The main findings of the research were that only one third of the respondents felt that the media played a positive role in society and that students preferred to follow commercial media rather than public news media, including TV, radio, print and also online media. Regarding the level of trust in the news media, and specifically trust in TV or radio, students trusted public broadcasters and commercial news media virtually equally. But when it came to newspapers, students trusted the national newspapers and Slovene online broadcast media (such as public broadcaster website [www.rtv.slo.si](http://www.rtv.slo.si)) more than tabloids (such as *Slovenske novice*, *Žurnal*) and commercial online media (24ur.com). But in

general, trust in the news media amongst young people in Slovenia was low.

Key words: media, media role, trust, perception, young adults

### Introduction

The content of the media has changed over the last few years. Across Europe there is less educational programming and more entertainment programmes on television. This is becoming more and more common everywhere. There are also an increasing number of small devices with considerable overlap in both content and functionality (Fagerjord & Storsul, 2007). Developments in digitalisation and media structure convergence has been presented alternately as a new order, as an umbrella (Fagerjord & Storsul, 2007), and as one of the central »concepts« in describing and understanding a variety of aspects in overall digital media developments (Liestøl, 2007). According to Sriramesh and Vercic (2009), ICTs have certainly changed the dynamics as far as access to mass media is concerned, but have they also changed the perception of the media's role amongst the generation of digital natives in Slovenia where multiplatform communication is a part of everyday living?

The media, as an important agent of society, serves the public by providing them with basic information but can also mobilise people regarding specific issues to bring about change in a society. The media can also disseminate specific cultural ideas among people in a society and can provide a pathway for the public to make their own judgments and decisions (Sadaf, 2011). But according to Sadaf (2011), because of media convergence, the media has become an even more powerful tool, through which one can control the minds of people or even produce a climate of harmony. Sadaf even claims that an especially strong impact can be seen by contemporary news media. In this era of technological revolution, the general public relies on media for immediate and up-to-date information (Sadaf, 2011), which is often provided quickly, sensationally, and initially unverified. Because of ICTs people are pushed towards a multitasking approach, where information comes from different platforms. Communication is therefore simultaneously influenced by blog posts and comments on breaking news.

Media convergence thereby undermines the perception of the role of the media and consequently also trust in the media. Namely, the public's perceptions are based on what the media present to them and these perceptions can be influenced very easily by different multiplatform communication methods and also by the content of media or organisations, which often through public relations help determine the day's news (Cameron, Sallot & Curtin, 2012). Due to this, the mass media are also critical towards strategic global public relations (Sriramesh and Vercic, 2009).

Therefore, the way in which people perceive the role of the media also influences how people trust it. According to Jones (2004), people nowadays no longer trust the media to report the news fairly. For Jones (2004) distrusting the media is a serious problem which influences every democracy that depends so much on news organisations to inform its citizens, and which has

considerable influence on individual attitudes, behaviour and perceptions (Hong, 2013). The issue of trust is also marked by tabloids, which sell entertainment and scandal, thus providing endless opportunities for conversation (Bird, 2003). Kohring and Matthes (2007) therefore claim that the various dimensions that individuals apply in the process of evaluating the trustworthiness of news media bear great theoretical and practical relevance.

The goal of our paper was to analyse, according to new consumer habits, the perception of the media's role in society and media trust amongst young people, specifically students, who are most susceptible to new technologies. Our interest focused specifically on young people in Slovenia, where access to mass media is widely available, and on their perception of the role of the media and their trust in specific daily news broadcasts, newspapers or online media, whether it be public/commercial or traditional/new media. The first part of our paper introduces the subject of convergence, and the perception of the media's role as well as trust in the media, which is considered to be an important basis for social order, a foundation for social cohesion and a key concept in the functioning of a modern society (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). In the second part we introduce the results of the research conducted in Slovenia amongst Slovenian students, which was carried out during the year 2013, to analyse young people's attitudes towards the media - in terms of the perception of the media's role in society and trust in the media.

## Understanding Media Convergence

Fagerjord and Storsul (2007) singled out six dominant interpretations of media convergence, i.e. the convergence of networks; terminals; services, rhetoric; markets, and regulatory regimes. The perceptions of convergence between communication networks, terminals, services and markets have had a strong impact on political discourse and regulations. There is also Bechmann (2007) who claims that the contemporary media scene is dominated by cross-media and the starting, or vantage, point is not digital media or the internet but, to a larger extent, still traditional media. Accordingly, any overlap between the broadcast, computer, and printing industries is far from a reality and the older media platforms still functions side-by-side with new internet platforms. Bechmann (2007) writes about cross-media as an overall story, production, or event, using a coordinated combination of platforms. Cross-media can be conceptualised from an outwardly as well as inwardly perspective: outwardly towards users, and inwardly within the media organisations themselves. Bechmann (2007) also wrote about media platforms, which he understood as physical devices for use and/or production that supplement each other in relation to different user contexts and productions. The media products on the other hand are the specific "media outputs" of the productions, independent of whichever platform they are distributed on. Media products can also be embedded within each other, for instance TV programmes as podcasts or as part of a website. According to Jenkins (2006) convergence is a word that manages to describe technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes depending on who is speaking and

what they think they are talking about and also a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections across dispersed media content. Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others. Media producers and consumers are thus participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules (Jenkins, 2006). According to Jenkins (2006) convergence is changing the ways in which the media industry functions and also the way in which average people think about their relationship to the media. Therefore, we are in a critical moment of changing the old rules, meaning that companies may be forced to renegotiate their relationships with consumers. All this complexity and all the possibilities of information creation and media distribution in modern information society is forcing us to rethink the concept of trusting information and trusting the media in general. According to Kohring and Matthes (2007) trust replaces knowledge and by trusting, the complexity of the future is reduced (Luhman in Kohring & Matthes, 2007).

## Perception and Trust of the media

The societal function of news media consists of selecting and conveying information and thereby enabling the public to fulfil their need for orientation within their social environments and with regard to other social participants (e.g., politicians, government). Journalists cannot provide all the information about any possible issue. Often they also rely on public relations, which sets the agenda for news media simply because the source in source-reporter interaction is often a public relations practitioner or a practitioner's client (Cameron, Sallot & Curtin, 2012). The news media always selectively informs the public about issues, personalities, and events, which is according to Kohring and Matthes (2007) a risky action. The theoretical basis for an analysis of trust in news media is therefore selectivity (Kohring & Matthes 2007). Journalists selectively choose certain information over other information. Therefore, as Kohring and Matthes (2007) claim, when trusting news media, people trust in specific selections. Trust in news media according to Kohring and Matthes (2007) is a necessary condition for trust in other social participants. Kohring and Matthes (2007) believe that when recipients come to trust in the news media, their assessment is based on the following four dimensions:

- (a) Trust in the Selectivity of Topics, the recipients trust that the news media will focus on those topics and events that are relevant to them.
- (b) Trust in the Selectivity of Facts. This dimension concerns the selection of facts or information that will present the topic within the proper contextualisation.
- (c) Trust in the Accuracy of Depictions; includes trust in verifiable and approvable accuracy of depicted facts.
- (d) Trust in Journalistic Assessment; trust in journalistic evaluation (advice, assessments of and appeals for action) of a topic.



Trust, according to Moloney (2005) is a fragile human feeling. Connected with the idea of social capital (networks of supportive people); it is the strong expectation we have that others will treat us supportively in the future because they have done so in the past. Trust is an index of social cohesion, a quality that keeps us together at a common centre rather than one that separates us, and so is important during our centrifugal times of accelerating pluralism and diversity (Moloney, 2005). Trust is a key concept for a functioning modern society because of its indefinite prospects and risky decisions (Kohring & Matthes, 2007).

Eisend and Knoll (2012) claimed, that trust results from trustworthiness, which is defined as the belief that a source (particular news media) provides information honestly and without being manipulative. Kohring and Matthes (2007) operationalised trustworthiness as impartiality and the absence of persuasive intentions. Trust is therefore an important dimension of source credibility next to source competence (Eisend & Knoll, 2012). Media credibility is, according to Eisend and Knoll (2012) a construct closely related to, but not the same, as trust. Source trust is, as Johnson Avery (2010) claimed, both constitutive of and a function of credibility. For Johnson Avery (2010), perceived expertise, transparency, and knowledge of the source are the three more central criteria to audience evaluations of credibility. Eisend and Knoll (2012) also mentioned communication competencies, which according to de Beer (2014) have an increasingly important role in an organisation's value creation process. Communication competencies and capabilities are hard to imitate and transfer, and its outputs and outcomes are more or less intangible (de Beer, 2014). For Moloney (2005), "trust" and "public relations" are two of the more abused words in an estranged relationship and the consequence of that lack of trust means less participation in society (Moloney, 2005). Trust in people and community members are valuable resources that bond and bridge individuals into achieving collective and common goals (Nah & Chung, 2012). Trust is perhaps the most important mechanism in helping people deal with the risks of an open future. Other mechanisms are, for example, contracts or planning. Trust enables people to compensate for the risk of giving up control to someone else (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). Therefore, trust includes the awareness of a certain risk. Both aspects, open future and perceived risk, are decisive for trust situations. In other words, when there is nothing at stake, trust is not needed (Kohring & Matthes, 2007).

Trust in news media therefore means trust in their specific selectivity rather than in objectivity or truth (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). The trust of the media's audience is thus based on the idea that information in the media guides recipients' further selection of information and also enables the members of the audience to function in a modern society and therefore influences their future decisions. That is why it is very important to know how young people perceive the role of the media in society and whether they trust the media and their selection of information in terms of responsibility for the future development of society.

## Method

A paper study was conducted in 2013 amongst students of the University of Maribor, Slovenia. For the purposes of analysis our study consisted of two parts. In the first part, we conducted 21 interviews with students from different fields and backgrounds. We were interested in the relationship young people had with the media - in terms of everyday use, the perception of the media's role in society and their trust in the media. Thus, we interviewed students at the University of Maribor who were enrolled in: the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (4); the Faculty of Medicine; the Faculty of Law (2); the Faculty of Education; the Faculty of Economics and Business (2); the Faculty of Arts (2); the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics (2); the Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences; the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering; the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security; the Faculty of Civil Engineering (2); the Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering; and the Faculty of Health Sciences.

The results of the analysed interviews formed the basis for preparing specific surveys that were conducted during the latter part of the research process. In the second part of our research, we carried out 220 questionnaires amongst the students of the University of Maribor, namely at the Faculty of Economics and Business (52), the Faculty of Arts (52), the Faculty of Agriculture and Life Sciences (31), the Faculty of Civil Engineering (22), the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science - information and communications technology (32), and Media communications (30). Of the 220 respondents, 47.3% were male and 52.7% female, all aged 18 to 29 years, the average age being 21 years. A sample survey was carried out at the faculties according to the proportion of total enrolment at the University of Maribor and thus based on a sample that accurately reflected the existing student structure.

The goal of the questionnaire was to answer the main research questions:

RQ1: How do young people perceive the media's role in society?

RQ2: How much do young people trust daily news broadcasts, newspapers and online media?

RQ3: How does the perception of the media's role in society amongst young students influence the trust they feel towards traditional and new media?

## Results

When considering the research questions, the baseline collated conclusions from the transcriptions of the interviews was that students followed both traditional and online media on a daily basis, but that the latter prevailed. With regard to content, students followed both public and commercial media when it came to informational, educational/documentary, entertainment topics. However, political topics amongst Slovenian students (at the University of Maribor) were not at the forefront. An analysis of the interviews showed that there was a serious amount of passivity amongst young people even though the interviewed students claimed that there were sufficient opportunities for

expressing opinions and/or active participation. Students see the main reason for passivity within consumerism, other forms of engagement, being flooded with information, and individualism. The interviews also showed that trust in the media had been seriously compromised amongst students of the University of Maribor but that it also depended on the type of media content: confidence in objective data, such as sports scores, was certainly higher than the confidence in the daily news. The passivity and distrust of the media opened up a new dimensional problem with regard to our research.

As previously mentioned, the results from the analysed interviews were to be the basis for preparing specific surveys, which were then to be conducted in the latter part of the research process. The results from the survey regarding students' perceptions of the media's role in society clearly showed that one-half of the respondents somewhat, or even fully, agreed with the statement that they were critical (50.9%) and sceptical (45.7%) of the media in general. 29.1% of students somewhat, or fully, agreed with the idea that the media played a positive role. They (49.8%) agreed or even fully agreed that the media do reveal irregularities in society, 53.9% believe that they contribute to world knowledge and education and 47.9% believe they provide a better knowledge and understanding of the needs and interests of different social groups and communities. In contrast, the survey also showed that students perceived the media as a means of enforcing economic interests (45.2%), political interests (66.7%), that the media encouraged consumerism (83%), contributed to increasing intolerance in society (59.4%) or increased violence in society (45.2%) (see Tables 1 and 2).

Year	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Fully agree
I am critical towards the media	7.7	15.9	25.5	34.1	16.8
I am sceptical of the media in general	8.7	17.4	28.3	31.1	14.6
I believe in the positive role of the media in society.	10	23.6	37.3	22.7	6.4
The media is as corrupt as society.	6.4	11.4	23.7	32.9	25.6

Table 1: Attitude towards the media - as a percentage

Year	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Fully agree
The media reveal irregularities in society.	5.9	11.4	32.9	42	7.8
The media are a means to enforce economic interests.	2.3	10.5	42	33.8	11.4
The media are a means to enforce political interests.	0.5	6.4	26.4	47.5	19.2
The media contribute to world knowledge and education.	4.1	11	31,1	47.5	6.4
The media encourage consumerism.	0	4.1	12.8	41.7	41.3
The media contribute to increasing intolerance in society.	1.8	4.6	34.2	41.1	18.3
The media contribute to an increase in violence in society.	2.3	12.9	39.6	31.8	13.4
The media contribute to a better knowledge and understanding of the needs and interests of different social groups and communities.	4.6	9.1	38.4	40.6	7.3

Table 2: The perception of the media

Our research also focused also on the concept of media trust. We can compare the trust they have between public and commercial media. We analysed three public television broadcasters (TV Dnevnik - TV Slovenia; Odmevi - TV Slovenia; SLO 3 - TV Slovenia) and three TV commercial (24ur - POP TV; 24ur zvečer - POP TV; Svet na Kanalu A) daily news broadcasts. The results showed that only 53.4% of students watched the daily news on public TV, whilst 89.6% of students watched commercial TV media. However, the results regarding media trust showed that amongst those students who watched certain media, the level of trust was almost equal between public (50.7%) and commercial TV (51%) even though the viewing share for commercial media was higher (see Tables 3).

	Strongly disagree Disagree			Neither agree nor disagree Agree Fully agree		
	TV Dnevnik Slovenia	Odmevi / TV Slovenia	SLO 3 / TV Slovenia	24ur / POP TV	24ur zvečer / POP TV	Svet na Kanal A
Do not follow, watch	72 33.0%	95 43.4%	138 63.6%	11 5.1%	25 11.4%	32 14.7%
Do not trust	9 4.1%	6 2.7%	15 6.9%	9 4.1%	9 4.1%	23 10.5%
More distrust than trust	10 4.6%	11 5.0%	13 6.0%	26 12.0%	20 9.1%	32 14.7%
Undecided	38 17.4%	39 17.8%	31 14.3%	60 27.6%	59 26.9%	49 22.5%
More trust than distrust	69 31.7%	51 23.3%	12 5.5%	74 34.1%	70 32.0%	56 25.7%
Completely trust	20 9.2%	17 7.8%	8 3.7%	37 17.1%	36 16.4%	26 11.9%
Total	218 100%	219 100%	217 100%	217 100%	219 100%	218 100%

Table 3: The level of trust – TV daily news broadcast.

We also analysed media trust with regard to public, local or regional radio, commercial radio and student radio daily news broadcasts. The results showed that more than two-thirds of the analysed students did not listen to public (68%) or student radio (68.3%). The students listened more to local or regional (66%) and commercial radio (63.3%). Media trust among students who listened to specific radio channels was as follows: 47.1% trusted or even completely trusted public radio, 54.2% trusted or even completely trusted local radio, 45.7% trusted or even completely trusted commercial radio and 44.9% of students trusted or even completely trusted student radio. This analysis also showed that amongst those students who listened to certain media, there was the same degree of trust for both public and commercial radio. The difference could only be seen in the number of hours they listened to certain radio channels (public, local and commercial or student) (see Table 4).

	Daily news program / public radio Slovenia	Daily news program / local or regional radio	Daily news program / commercial radio	Daily news program / student radio
Do not follow, watch	149 68.0%	73 34.0%	80 36.7%	149 68.3%
Do not trust	8 3.7%	4 1.9%	8 3.7%	4 1.8%
More distrust than trust	9 4.1%	12 5.6%	16 7.3%	6 2.8%
Undecided	20 9.1%	49 22.8%	51 23.4%	28 12.8%
More trust than distrust	25 11.4%	58 27.0%	52 23.9%	25 11.5%
Completely trust	8 3.7%	19 8.8%	11 5.0%	6 2.8%
Total	219 100%	215 100%	218 100%	218 100%

Table 4: The level of trust in radio

Regarding print media, 52.1% of students read the national newspaper Delo, 45.9% read the newspaper Dnevnik, 63.5% of students read the regional newspaper Večer and the same percentage also read the tabloid Slovenske novice. 77.5% of the surveyed students read the tabloid Žurnal, 47.2% read Finance, and 20.6% read the regional newspaper Primorske novice. The percentage of students who trusted or completely trusted a specific newspaper, among students who read certain newspapers was as follows: 47.4% students trust or completely trust the newspaper Delo, 51% trust Dnevnik, 57.6% trust Večer, 37.4% trust Slovenske novice, 31.4% trust Žurnal, 50.5% trust Finance, and 17.8% trust Primorske novice. The results showed that students mostly read the tabloids Žurnal (77.5%) and Slovenske novice (63.5%) and also the regional newspaper Večer (63.5%). The results showed that among students that read certain newspapers, trust was slightly higher for the regional newspaper Večer than the other analysed print media. But it is important to know that the newspaper Večer is one of the leading newspapers in the eastern part of Slovenia (see Table 5).

	Strongly disagree Disagree			Neither agree nor disagree Agree Fully agree			
	Delo	Dnevnik	Finance	Večer	Primorske novice	Slovenske novice	Žurnal
Do not follow, read	105 47.9%	118 54.1%	115 52.8%	80 36.5%	173 79.4%	80 36.5%	49 22.5%
Do not trust	11 5.0%	7 3.2%	7 3.2%	7 3.2%	10 4.6%	18 8.2%	24 11.0%
More distrust than trust	12 5.5%	13 6.0%	18 8.3%	10 4.6%	7 3.2%	26 11.9%	32 14.7%
Undecided	37 16.9%	29 13.3%	26 11.9%	42 19.2%	20 9.2%	43 19.6%	60 27.5%
More trust than distrust	40 18.3%	36 16.5%	26 11.9%	52 23.7%	6 2.8%	36 16.4%	36 16.5%
Completely trust	14 6.4%	15 6.9%	26 11.9%	28 12.8%	2 0.9%	16 7.3%	17 7.8%
Total	219 100%	218 100%	218 100%	219 100%	218 100%	219 100%	218 100%

Table 5: The level of trust - print media.

Concerning online media, 59.2% of students follow daily news on rtvslo.si, 94.5% visit 24ur.com, 58.4% rely on siol.net, 44.9% go to vecer.si, 38.8% visit delo.si and 34.4% use dnevnik.si. Amongst students who followed specific online media, we find: 66.7% of students trust or completely trust rtvslo.si, 44.4% trust 24ur.com, 36.7% trust siol.net, 52.6% trust vecer.si, 49.4% trust delo.si and 37.3% trust dnevnik.si. The results showed that among 59.2% of students who follow specific online media, there were more people who trusted rtv.slo the most (66.7%) while among the 94.5% students who follow 24ur.com, less than half of the students (44.4%) trust or completely trust 24ur.com. The results showed that students followed more commercial online media, such as 24ur.com, but trusted Slovene online broadcasting services more, such as rtvslo.si (see Table 6).

	rtvslo.si	24ur.com	siol.net	vecer.si	delo.si	dnevnik.si
Do not follow, read	89 40.8%	12 5.5%	91 41.6%	119 55.1%	134 61.2%	143 65.6%
Do not trust	4 1.8%	24 11.0%	13 5.9%	5 2.3%	5 2.3%	8 3.7%
More distrust than trust	8 3.7%	38 17.4%	16 7.3%	14 6.5%	12 5.5%	10 4.6%
Undecided	31 14.2%	53 24.2%	52 23.7%	27 12.5%	26 11.9%	29 13.3%
More trust than distrust	60 27.5%	68 31.1%	38 17.4%	35 16.2%	29 13.2%	19 8.7%
Completely trust	26 11.9%	24 11.0%	9 4.1%	16 7.4%	13 5.9%	9 4.1%
Total	218 100%	219 100%	219 100%	216 100%	219 100%	218 100%

Table 6: The level of trust - online media

We also analysed the correlation between the students' perceptions of the media's role in society and trust in the media (N=220). In our analysis, we defined the perception of the media's role as an independent variable and trusting specific media as a dependant variable. When using a multiple linear regression analysis (ENTER method), the analysis showed a very low correlation between the students' perceptions of the media's role and trust in the media (radio ( $\beta=.194$ ;  $t=2.553$ ;  $sig=.012$ ;  $F=6.518$ ;  $R^2=.038$ ), print ( $\beta=.198$ ;  $t=2.974$ ;  $sig=.003$ ;  $F=8.842$ ;  $R^2=.039$ ), online media ( $\beta=.199$ ;  $t=2.978$ ;  $sig=.003$ ;  $F=8.870$ ;  $R^2=.039$ ) and media in general ( $\beta=.207$ ;  $t=3.123$ ;  $sig=.002$ ;  $F=9.754$ ;  $R^2=.043$ ). A statistically significant correlation could not be seen when only speaking about relationships with TV in general ( $\beta=.105$ ;  $t=1.516$ ;  $sig=.131$ ;  $F=2.298$ ;  $R^2=.011$ ). But when analysing students' perceptions of the media's role and the public ( $\beta=.017$ ;  $t=.213$ ;  $sig=.831$ ;  $F=.045$ ;  $R^2=.000$ ) or commercial TV ( $\beta=.182$ ;  $t=2.663$ ;  $sig=.008$ ;  $F=7.094$ ;  $R^2=.033$ ), the analysis showed a weak but statistically significant correlation between two variables: the perception of the media's role and trust in commercial TV.

Three of the most important reasons for following the media, according to the students, include: the depth of the selected topics (4.39), impartiality and credibility (4.78) and information for all segments of the population (4.95).

The research showed that only one third of respondents perceived a positive role for the media in society and that students preferred to follow commercial rather than public news media. In



contrast, with regard to the level of trust in the news media, the students (with regard to TV or radio) trusted the public and commercial news media virtually equally. However, when it came to newspapers, students trusted national newspapers and Slovene online broadcast media more, such as rtvslo.si rather than tabloids (Slovenske novice, Žurnal) and online media (24ur.com).

## Conclusion

Our research revealed very critical and sceptical student attitudes towards the media in general. Only one third of the respondents believed that the media played a positive role in society. Most of them saw the media as a means of enforcing political and economic interests, and encouraging consumerism. The analysis also revealed that students preferred to follow commercial rather than public media, with regard to TV, radio, print and also online media. However, when it came to trust in the media, the students trusted public and commercial media equally, at least when speaking of TV or radio. In contrast, when it came to newspapers, trust was greater in national daily newspapers such as Delo, Dnevnik, Finance, and Večer, even though they preferred reading tabloid newspapers like Slovenske novice and Žurnal. With regard to online media, the results showed that students followed more commercial online media, such as 24ur.com, but trust was higher in Slovene public service broadcasting, such as rtvslo.si. The regression analysis (ENTER method) showed a very low correlation between students' perceptions of the media's role in society and trusting it. A statistically significant correlation could be seen only when analysing commercial TV, print media, online media, radio and media in general.

Generally, our analysis showed a low level of interest in public daily news broadcasts on TV or radio, national newspapers or the Slovene broadcaster's online service. Research also showed less trust in commercial media and slightly higher levels of trust in the public media. The results suggested that the students preferred the more sensational reporting provided by commercial media but still trusted more in the objective reporting supplied by public mass media.

With regard to further research, we propose further analysing which factors influence the level of trust in news media amongst young people and which factors motivate young people's interest in following daily news information. We also propose (according to Kohring & Matthes, 2007) to follow four dimensions for analysis: Trust in the Selectivity of Topics, Trust in the Selectivity of Facts, Trust in the Accuracy of Depictions and Trust in Journalistic Assessment, in order to delve deeper into the concept of media trust and find the reasons for such low levels of trust amongst young people. The concept of media trust is extremely important for the future development of our society because it influences democracy, individuals' attitudes, behaviour and perceptions, bridging and activating individuals to achieving collective and common goals, and influences the functioning of modern society. Mass media as a key mechanism in public relations should be researched through the concept of trust, which underpins the credibility and overall position of mass media in society. Even if the ICTs changed the role of the media in today's multiplatform

society, trust towards the mass media would be extremely important for the media's role in society. Technology obscures the boundaries between the traditional senders and recipients of information, which also alters the position of mass media in society. The position of the media is also influenced by the perceptions of media users, wherein the trust of the users is an essential element.

Our research focused on young adults, so-called 'digital natives', as it is assumed that they are the main users of media today and will be the primary users of media in the future. Their attitudes towards the media are important for the success of media development, in which media convergence also plays a key role. Trust towards the media and the perception of the media's role by 'digital natives' should be incorporated into any media development plans of the future.

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## 5. About BledCom

### About BledCom

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